



THE CATSPA

William Hamilton Osborne

Mr. J. W. Smith

Dear Sir,

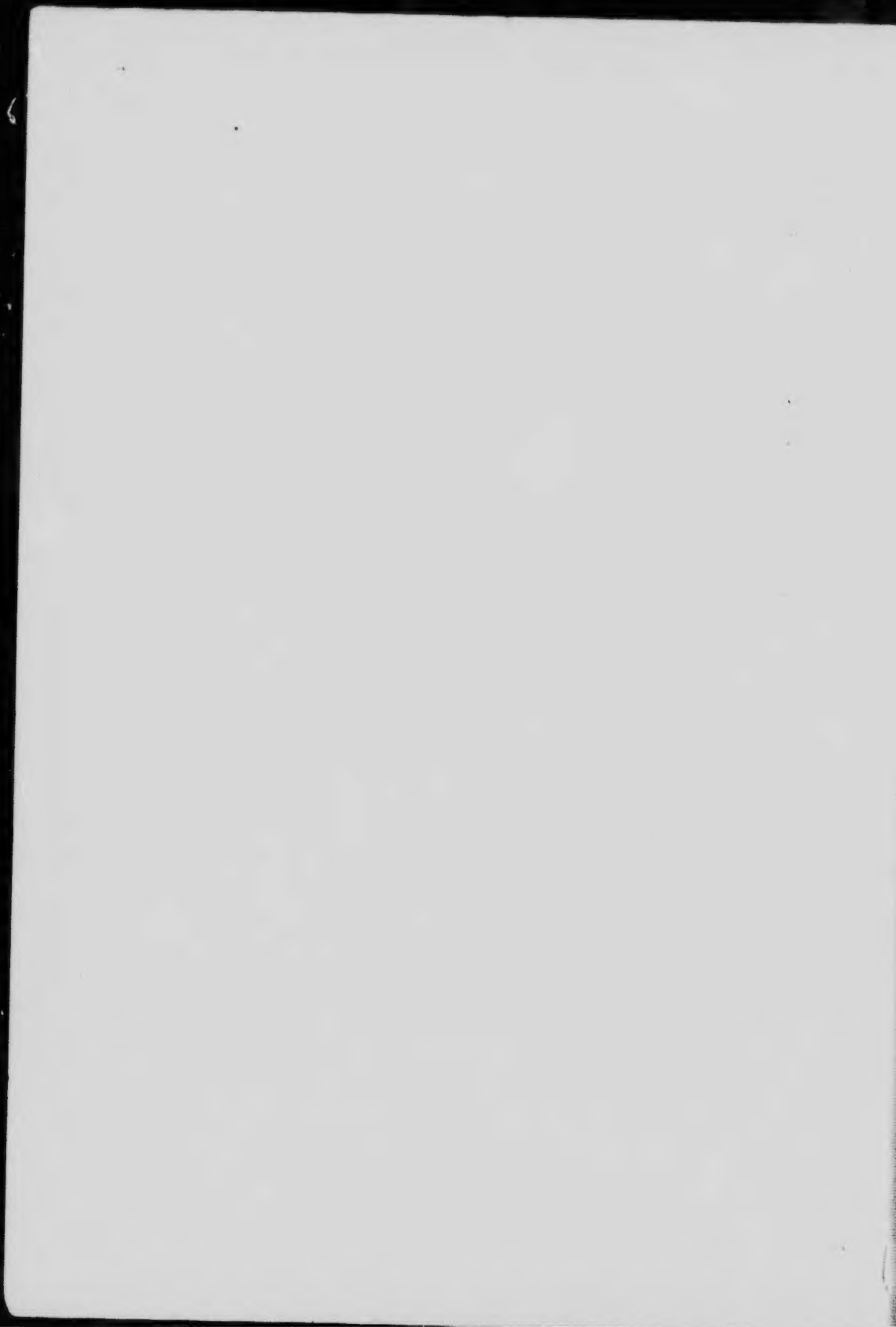
I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 10th inst.

and in reply to inform you that the same has been forwarded to the proper authorities.

Yours faithfully,
J. W. Smith

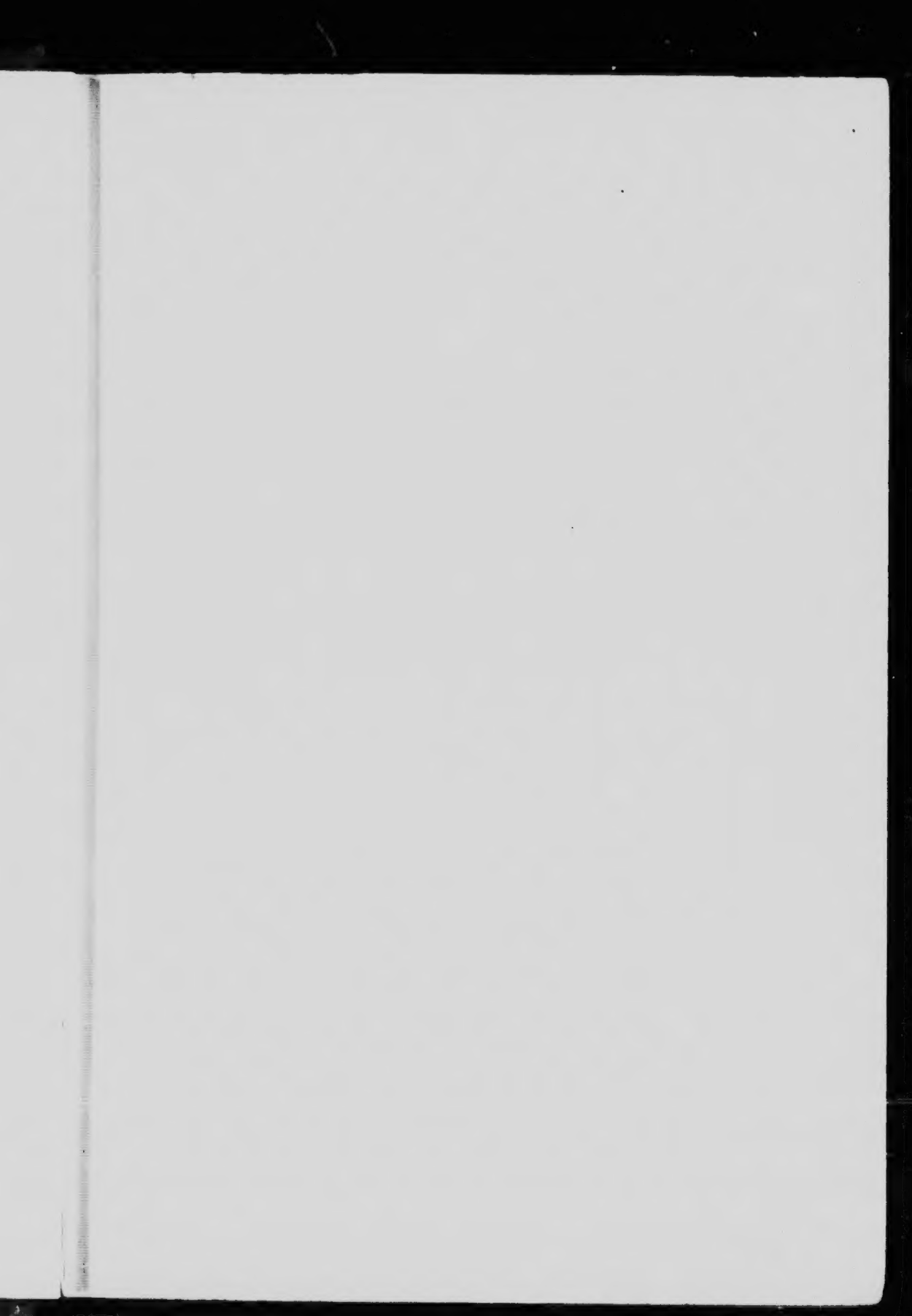
Very respectfully,
J. W. Smith

1870





THE CATSPA W





Roxane

THE CATSPA W

By

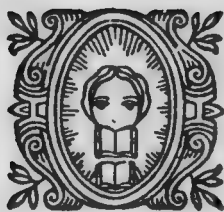
WILLIAM HAMILTON OSBORNE

Author of

"The Red Mouse," "The Running Fight," Etc.

With Illustrations by

F. GRAHAM COOTES



TORONTO
WILLIAM BRIGGS

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TO
K. H. O.

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CHAPTER I

ROXANE ENTERS TOWN

It would be absurd to say—though some did—that it never could have happened anywhere else; nor was it a question of keeping eyes and ears open; it was nothing more nor less than a peculiarly obstinate refusal, at least on the part of her admirers, to see the woman as she really was. Had her antecedent existence not been shrouded in mystery, then, of course, it is probable. . . . But for the better understanding of the remarkable career of Roxane Bellairs—for as such the good people of M—— will ever remember her—it is necessary to begin at the beginning, or, to be more exact, with her advent upon the arena of events on the 13th of May, 190—.

In connection with her arrival at the station two features, however trivial, are perhaps worthy of notice: first, that the lady's trunks and boxes—both in quality and quantity—shattered all the local traditions in the individual-luggage class; second, —and largely consequent upon the first,—that the

appearance of the lady herself, despite the simplicity of her costume, created a stir among the people on the platform that fell but little short of being a sensation. As for the station-master, that individual underwent, obviously, a strenuous quarter of an hour; but when the last leather receptacle had been dragged from the car and deftly landed on the very top of the huge pile of her belongings, he faced about, and in joyful contemplation of the battle that was to come, ejaculated: "She's got 'em all beat! Mrs. Tony, take it straight from me, won't be one-two-three with this one!" And here, parenthetically, it should be added, that, although social distinctions might seem to be somewhat out of his line, he knew who was who, did Bowles, the station-master.

But apparently oblivious to the attention she was attracting, and showing no evidence whatever of that uncertainty of purpose,—so noticeable in strangers,—this quiet-looking young woman stood for a moment or two upon the platform, giving Bowles explicit directions. Then, hailing a cab and declining with rare discrimination the cabby's earnest entreaties that she should put up at the Jermyn,—the newest and most pretentious hos-

telry,—she directed him to jog along slowly towards the centre of the town until told to stop—an order that he received when opposite the exclusive Indian Queen, the town's oldest and most representative family hotel.

Now, whether what followed was part of a carefully concocted plan or that luck was with her to an extraordinary extent, it was certain that no sooner had her cab come to a standstill before the chosen inn than there dashed about the corner a well-turned-out coach, whose guard announced the termination of the journey with a shrill and not unmusical blow of a trumpet, and whose driver—despite the fact that the skittish and high-strung bays seemed, when rounding the corner, to be all up in the air at once—managed his four so skilfully that they were perfectly in hand before he pulled them up at the curb, his off-leader,—tame as a kitten, the moment he was brought to a standstill,—proceeding at once to rub noses with the worn and jaded equine that belonged to the stranger's conveyance.

On the point of alighting, one small gloved hand resting on the window-sill, the woman's intention

was, apparently, stayed by the sudden advent of the tally-ho; and, sinking quietly back into a corner of her cab, she contented herself with a languid but comprehensive survey of the passengers—all of them, as she was soon to learn, prominent in the town's most fashionable, smartest (or whatever the latest word is) set—who were descending one by one to the sidewalk, where they stood laughing and chatting. Presently she slightly shifted her position and let her gaze pass to the off-leader, from him to his fellow, thence to the wheeler, and from thence along the lines to the whip. It travelled no farther.

For, almost at the same instant, the blond-bearded individual on the box, raising his head, focused his attention on the cab; and, unobserved by any of his party, the eyes of the man and the woman met in a glance that was clearly one of mutual admiration, even if he could not keep a semi-amused expression from showing on his face. As for the woman, she, evidently, was satisfied with the message that she had read; and, quickly leaving the cab and crossing the broad sidewalk to the hotel entrance—the cabby trailing on behind with her hand-bag,—she stepped up

to the desk where, in a firm, bold hand, she wrote her name upon the register. Before, however, the clerk could follow this action with the customary civilities, she leaned toward him and inquired in a low voice, which showed just a trace of foreign accent:—

“The gentleman who drove the coach—what is his name, please?”

At that moment the coaching-party held the clerk's attention to the exclusion of all others; but when they had passed on to the palm-room, he turned to the new arrival and said:—

“I beg pardon, madam, that's Mr. Kittredge St. John.”

“Oh!” fell from the woman's lips. “I was merely curious. . . .”

The clerk favoured her with a smile. It was not the first time that this question had been put to him by fair admirers of the handsome driver of the coach. And now, beckoning to a hall-boy,—to whom the lobby delivered the hand-bag,—he told him to take the lady to the Hobart suite,—so called from the time that it had been occupied by New Jersey's favourite son,—adding:—

"They're the finest rooms in the house, madam; we've held them since your wire."

Acknowledging his courtesy with a slight inclination of the head, the lady started to follow the boy, suddenly halted, hesitated a moment, and finally retraced her steps.

"I've decided to lunch before going up," she said. "The dining-room, please. . . ."

She was informed that, besides the general dining-room, there was the grill- or palm-room; she chose the latter; in fact, said she preferred it. When she entered the low-studded, festive-looking room, St. John and his party were already seated and were the objects of well-born curiosity. At a glance, however, she espied a lone table in a far corner; quickly she appropriated it, for it suited well her purpose to feast her eyes upon the handsome, well-remembered face of the young man who sat at the head of a long table surrounded by his friends—a purpose that no one there suspected, save, perhaps, the man himself.

And, indeed, what with his light, curly hair, his fun-loving eyes, a face tanned by the wind and sun, blond moustache and beard, and well-cut clothes fitting a superb figure, this Kittredge St. John was

a very promising-looking young man, notwithstanding the fact that a further acquaintance with him is likely to reveal certain qualities that, however admirable for his designs, are not generally attributed to a man of fashion. But no matter how little deserving of approval was his life, in appearance, at least, he was everything that a gentleman should be; while his personality was precisely the kind that charms and is sought after by society—society as represented by the young men-about-town and débutantes. In short, he seemed a most desirable person to know.

It was several moments, therefore, before the lady, lunching by herself, found time to take stock of the members of his party. The men, she perceived, were pretty much of a type; the women looked smart and were mostly of the sort that men call amusing. There was one tall, slender girl, however, of a little different stamp, who sat on St. John's right; and the stranger noted—not without a shade of anxiety crossing her face—that he, evidently, had singled her out as being more worthy of his solicitude than the rest of his guests; in fact, the assiduity and perseverance of his attentions to his neighbour were so marked as the

meal proceeded that the woman's face became a trifle hard. But presently, perhaps as a result of scanning the girl narrowly, her face broke into a smile of satisfaction, and summoning her waiter she put to him, under pretence of giving an order, some pertinent inquiries, the conversation being carried on in French.

All this time the men of St. John's party were not unmindful, needless to say, of the fact that this remarkably attractive and unattended young woman was sitting at a small nearby table. Not a moment went by without one of them covertly casting an approving glance in her direction, though, singularly enough, St. John failed to give any sign of being aware of her presence there. Now her meal was finished; but before leaving she gave a hasty, critical look at her soft, woollen gown of the shade known as wistaria—a colour that she always affected either in the gown itself or the details of it—and, after reassuring herself that it fitted the lines of her figure so perfectly that every woman present could not help being envious, she rose and undulated slowly past St. John's pleasure-seeking, animated-looking guests. And that her departure was well timed, were she

desirous of attracting further attention, was evidenced by the exclamations which fell from every lip the moment she passed out of the room, even the rather indifferent Miss Paget turning to her nearest neighbour with:—

“Pretty, isn’t she! I wonder who can she be?”

But as everybody present was asking the same question, no answer was forthcoming; and in consequence the pompously amiable Mr. Bonwit, of the Manufacturers’ National, forgot his dignity so far as to tiptoe from the table into the corridor for a last fleeting glance of the fair stranger, while even Mrs. Tony Shackleton was so exercised that she despatched Jerome Olyphant to look her up on the hotel register.

“Hold on, Jerry, I’ll go with you!” sang out Major Holbrook from his side of the table. “Two heads, you know . . .”

“In a multitude of counsellors there is much wisdom,” piped up little Varnum, rising from his place on the other side of Dorothy Paget; and together the three renegades turned their backs upon the women they knew to find out all they could about the woman they did not know.

Their return was almost boisterous.

"She's gone!" they announced in chorus, and fell into their chairs.

"Gone?" asked St. John, half-rising, and for the first time showing any interest.

". . . gone where nobody can see her," laughed the Major. "She's got the Hobart suite on the second floor."

"And her name," chirped in little Varnum, "is Mrs. Lellairs—I took it down."

"From Quebec," added Olyphant.

Whereupon Mrs. Tony Shackleton permitted herself a little time for reflection. The invasion of a stranger was always a matter of moment. But however fine an example the lady had just given of a sweet and unobtrusive manner, Mrs. Tony felt it incumbent upon her to divine whether or not it was merely a mask to cover a wickedness too subtle for mere man to understand. Curiously enough, however, any inclination she may have had to announce her conviction that the lady had a past, was lost in an admiration that was born of her own secret hope of a future, and there was almost a note of envy in the voice that declared:—

"At any rate, she's a thoroughbred!" Which

remark met with a storm of approval from the male members of St. John's party, Mr. Bonwit smiting the table with his pudgy hand until the glasses rang as he cried out:—

“Capital! Good for you, Mrs. Tony!” And, turning to his neighbour, he added: “Miss Paget, how about you? What do you think . . . ?”

For some reason, known only to herself, Miss Paget answered the question with a question:—

“What's Mr. St. John's opinion of her?”

St. John started out of a reverie.

“Let me see her name?” that gentleman began, a little absently. “That slip of paper, Archie, and I'll tell you . . .”

Although St. John had succeeded well in not being observed, all through the meal he had watched the person now being discussed. He noted how, at first, no one could approach her table without her face showing a startled look; how she repeatedly glanced toward the entrance; that she did not wholly recover her composure until some time had passed. But that Mrs. Shackleton, with her somewhat limited knowledge of the world, should venture to pass any kind of judgment on the stranger, struck him as having

its amusing side. Nevertheless, after toying carelessly with the card, he answered:—

“ I agree with Mrs. Tony.” And then added significantly: “ She’s a thoroughbred, all right ! ”

Mrs. Tony thought she detected a note of disparagement in his tone.

“ But what on earth could a woman of that sort do in our town ? ” she asked ingenuously—a question which was immediately followed by a ridiculous exhibition of self-consciousness on the part of every man present.

As for the subject of their conversation, she had proceeded to her suite of rooms, where trunks and boxes in profusion awaited her. Nothing more was seen of her that afternoon; nor did she leave her apartments in the evening. And so far as the hotel knew, and so far as the town knew, Louis, the waiter, who had served her in the palm-room and likewise with a slight repast at seven o’clock, was the last person to see her that night.

CHAPTER II

A WELCOME INTRUDER

THE Indian Queen Hotel rests on an eminence near the centre of the town. From its broad windows a good view is to be had of the city stretching to the north as far as the distant hills. To the east, and directly below the Hobart suite, are the hotel gardens with their carefully kept shrubs, plants, and flowers.

That the new occupant of these apartments regarded them with approval goes without saying. Never in her career—and it was afterwards said that she had somehow contrived to have always a gorgeous setting for her base of exploits—had she found surroundings more to her liking. Luxurious by nature—though for reasons which will be seen later she had dispensed with the services of a maid—she wandered from room to room, busy-ing herself with making herself thoroughly at home and revelling in the big, old-fashioned closets, the comfortable chairs, and dainty furnishings. But, as the evening hours slipped by, she

was conscious of a feeling that is, perhaps, best described as depression. It was plain that she was mentally disturbed; that there was something on her mind from which she could not escape; and, under the stress of this emotion, she walked to and fro from one room to another. It had nothing to do with her arrival in the town—she was perfectly well aware of the excellent impression she had made. Indeed, there was no need for anxiety on that point, since a superb cheval glass reflected an exquisitely beautiful woman, tall, with deep blue eyes and dark hair, robed in a marvelous violet-strewn *crêpe-de-chine* gown that accentuated the slight, long-waisted figure—such as one sees nowadays—in a way that made it appear decidedly girlish. At last this feeling, apparently, was overpowering her, and, with an impulsive movement of irritation, she switched off the lights, went over to the window, drew back the curtains, and stood for a long time looking out into the night.

How quiet everything was! Not a soul to be seen anywhere! The beauty of the scene held her. After a while the moon slipped behind some clouds, and she was about to let the curtains fall

when she thought she discerned some one moving stealthily in the garden. In a flash she became the self-collected woman that she really was, all her senses becoming alert as she quickly focused her eyes upon the spot where she believed she had seen some one—taking care that the folds of the heavy curtains should hide her until she should ascertain whether her presentiment was right.

A minute passed, another, and still she watched. But the next moment, leaning far out of the window, she strangled a little cry of surprise; and, quickly letting the curtains fall back into place, she glided noiselessly across the room and tried the locks of all the doors. When she turned, a man was making his way through one of the windows.

"Kitt!" she whispered.

"Right!" came in a care-free voice.

"Is it really you, Kitt?" she repeated softly.

The man laughed lightly.

"How did you make it?" she went on.

For answer he pointed to the window.

"I came by the fire-escape."

"But some one must have seen you?" she inquired, alarmed.

Again he smiled.

"Have you forgotten so soon that to move unseen is my specialty?" And, leading her to a window, he continued: "Do you see that bulky edifice where the lights shine dimly from its windows? That building is the Iroquois Club. I'm supposed to be there. Its lawn adjoins on the west; here below us run the hotel gardens; I crossed in the shadows and came to you." He clasped her now in his arms.

"I hardly knew you, Kitt, in that blond beard," she said. "And yet, your eyes . . ."

"You like it then?" he asked, stroking his moustache with caressing white fingers.

"To tell the truth, I never saw you looking better," she told him with undisguised admiration. "Of course, you were handsome without it," she hastened to add; "but with it you are sublime! You must wear it always if for no other reason than . . ."

She broke off suddenly on hearing footsteps outside in the corridor. St. John glanced at her questioningly; she nodded affirmatively.

"Locked? Good!" he said; and, after a moment, he went on, a suspicion of a smile lurking

in his eyes: "I hear that you are now Mrs. Bellairs, of Quebec. Tell me, did you ever reach Quebec?"

"No. I didn't get that far," she answered, burying her face in her hands to shut out from him some of the emotion that she felt even in the darkness must be there. "It's three years," she commented reflectively, "since I've seen you. They had no right . . ."

"Oh, don't bother about the years! Let's forget them—forget the unpleasant things! But where are the lights? I haven't had a good look at you, Roxie;" and he ran his hand along the side of the wall.

"Don't!" she cried. "You must be mad . . . ! Why, the shades are up!" And, going over to the windows, she drew down the shades; he switched on the lights as she turned to come back.

"There! . . ." he began.

"Three years," she broke in confusedly.

"Cut them out, Roxie!" a little impatiently.

"However, I must say they've been deuced kind to you. Why, you're more wonderful than ever!"

And indeed she was. For the pallor that some

strange experience had left upon her face had only enhanced her attractiveness.

"Have you any money to spare now?" he demanded, somewhat abruptly. And, despite his beard, his face had a distinctly boyish expression.

Roxane burst out laughing.

"Money to spare? As if any woman ever had money to spare!" She shrugged her shoulders.

"No; but I have luggage. And you?"

St. John ignored her question and merely laughed. Presently he said:—

"Of course, you received my letters?"

"Yes."

"They didn't tell you—because they couldn't—what I've done in the last three years here."

"Oh, then you've——"

"Done just what you wanted me to do—followed your instructions to the letter. I walked into the town one day and hung up my hat. Since then"—he drew himself up—"well, you must have seen—you saw me in the palm-room to-day?"

She looked up at him quickly, genuine admiration shone in her eyes.

"Kitt, you are *drôle*—you are irresistible!

Why, you have only to walk in anywhere and hang up your hat! Is that not so?"

After an inappreciable pause, he said:—

"Roxie, I'm wondering how you'll get along here. There is no doubt about the men—I saw that to-day. They'll admire you, all right. The question is the women—and in the end, you know, it's always the women who decide. . . . However, if you get the Tony Shackletons with you, and I believe you can, the rest will be easy."

"I see," she laughed. "You began with the women; well, then, I shall begin with the men. For one thing, it will be more fun. But tell me," she suddenly demanded, her eyes narrowing, "how about this richest girl in town—this Miss Dorothy Paget?"

St. John flushed, for there was just a tinge of jealousy, he thought, in Roxane's attitude. Indeed, a sharper note had crept into her voice; and it was with some trepidation that he hastened to reassure her.

"Don't be alarmed, my dear, it's only a flirtation—the mildest kind . . ."

"It's less of a flirtation, Kitt, than you imag-

ine," she told him pointedly. "You are making love to Miss—Miss Dorothy Paget, and no one knows better than you how to make love to a young girl. But does she make love to you? Oh, don't look at me that way! I know what I'm saying. You are wasting your time, believe me. Besides, there are other women with whom you might make more headway."

Again he flushed, this time with positive annoyance at her cleverness, for he felt that what she had said was true.

"Naturally," he explained, "I felt it wise to try to make an impression on the richest girl in town."

"Of course," she answered mockingly.

He disdained her little stab and was silent.

"You are one of the best-known men in town?" she went on.

"Apparently. But that doesn't get me any money."

She placed her hand upon his shoulder.

"And there is nothing, absolutely nothing against you—here in town?"

"Nothing. But it's high time I did something. I need the money; so do you. When you say the



She motioned to him to sit down beside her

word, Roxie, I shall be ready to begin, and I know I shall succeed."

Roxane thought for a moment.

"What particular line?" she asked.

"The old one," he told her.

The pallor deepened on her face.

"Why not the safer, cleverer methods?"

He shook his head.

"The clever methods are no longer up-to-date. Besides, were I to sell a share of stock, or anything of that kind, I'd be suspected in an instant."

"But the old methods are risky?" she faltered.

"What's got into you, Roxie? Playing scared, are you? Buck up! However, the scheme that I've planned has never been done."

"Tell me about it," she asked with great enthusiasm; and, drawing two chairs up before the small wood fire burning cheerfully in the grate, she motioned to him to sit down beside her. "Now," she said, thrusting the tips of her shoes on the fender, and, with half-turned profile, gazing up at him.

"Did I not tell you that I crossed the lawn of the hotel-gardens and climbed the fire-escape to you without being seen? No one in this town

knows that I am here; fifty people believe me in the club. Roxie, I have not been idle these three years."

"Why do you insist upon keeping me in the dark? Open up—what's the game?"

"A simple enough one," was his enigmatic answer.

Roxane looked at him curiously; his eyes were dancing; there was a flush on his cheek. Instinctively she knew that they stood on the threshold of a great enterprise.

"Roxie, don't ask too many questions. Some day you will understand, but that day is not yet. However, I'm ready to act when you say the word."

Roxane wrinkled her brow. She knew St. John too well to press him further on an interdicted subject.

"I don't half-like this secrecy," she returned, and made a little grimace.

"But I, I . . ." And he drew himself up, squared his shoulders, and a shrug completed his sentence.

For a moment there was a silence; it was the woman who broke it.

"I looked around a bit before I made up my mind to come to this town. To be precise, it was not only the hope of meeting you that brought me here; it was the chance that seemed to offer itself to do these people." She chuckled.

St. John's eyes sought hers again.

"That reminds me," he said; "where can we meet?"

"Surely not here—not anywhere in town. You should not have come to me to-night. It's not safe for you—not safe for any scheme of ours that we should be seen together."

"But how shall we meet?" he persisted.

"In Manhattan, of course."

"The old place?"

"Why not? Neither of us has been there for these three years."

"The old signal, too, I suppose?"

Memory lighted up her face.

"Yes. In the meantime I'm going to have my fling!"

And, being a woman, in the end she had her way, and, having her way, it was not fifteen hours before she started to put it into execution.

CHAPTER III

JULES GASPARD FIGURES MORE OR LESS

THE president of the Manufacturers' National sat twirling his thumbs in front of his expansive waist-coat, thinking, singularly enough, of the woman who sat in a corner of the palm-room of the Indian Queen Hotel the afternoon before. A clerk entered and placed upon the desk a card.

"A lady to see you, sir," he said; and Mr. Bonwit, never more happy than when in the society of the fair sex, twirled his thumbs with greater satisfaction, and nodded patronisingly, saying quickly:—

"Show her in, Peters, show her in." But when his glance rested on the card, his face paled and reddened in turn. "Wait, Peters!" he called out, "wait a moment before showing her in!" And, springing from his chair with an agility quite remarkable for one of his years, Mr. Bonwit repaired to a little alcove in the corner of his office, where, standing before a mirror, he examined the state of his countenance; and not until he had seen

that his collar pressed becomingly against his fat neck, and had carefully brushed up such hirsute adornment as remained upon the top of his head, did Mr. Bonwit return to his chair at his desk.

"Now, Peters," he announced, "you can show the lady in."

"I am Mrs. Bellairs," said his visitor, entering with an unsuccessful assumption of business-like purpose.

Mr. Bonwit quickly placed a chair. Then his hand strayed to his forehead to make sure that the work done by the military brushes had not yet been undone, strayed to his necktie to see that his diamond pin occupied its usual effective position, and finally strayed to his coat-pocket to see that the right quantity of handkerchief-border was in evidence.

"I am very glad to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Bellairs," he now said with a great deal of warmth. "What can I do for you? You desire to open an account?"

Roxane bowed and fumbled with the dainty silver-mounted bag which she invariably carried with her.

Mrs. Bellairs was good to look upon, particularly good, thought Mr. Bonwit, his eyes never once leaving her face. Presently the woman turned her full gaze upon him, an action that embarrassed and yet delighted him, for there was something in her manner of focusing her glance—and especially now—that gave her the appearance of being wholly engrossed.

"I propose to open an account with you, Mr. Bonwit," she quietly informed him, "but possibly not for ten days. I have come to you for quite another purpose," she added, as though her only reason for coming to Mr. Bonwit was Mr. Bonwit himself,—a thought that sent the colour creeping pleasantly far above that gentleman's collar.

"I am not a business woman," Mrs. Bellairs continued; "and yet, there is one piece of business that I have learned from my husband."

Mr. Bonwit's brow clouded as he interrupted her quickly with:—

"And may I ask what is the piece of business, Mrs. Bellairs, that you have learned from—from your husband?"

"He was a man of large business interests," sighed the visitor.

"Oh, then your husband is dead," he said with seemingly ill-concealed pleasure.

Roxane nodded affirmatively. Mr. Bonwit's change of tone by no means escaped her.

She went on:—

"Yes, he was a man of large business interests, and he always told me that if I found myself in a strange place and needed to employ a lawyer, that there was only one way to get a man upon whom one could rely absolutely."

Mr. Bonwit opened wide his eyes; he was plainly interested.

"And that was?"

"... to get the lawyer for a national bank in the town I happened to be in," she informed him, smiling. "Such a man, he assured me, was bound to be reliable."

"A capital idea," observed Mr. Bonwit, returning her smile. A moment later he added: "So you need a lawyer, do you?"

"Yes. Therefore, I have come to you," she said in her most engaging manner.

"Humph!" came from Mr. Bonwit. "But are you quite sure about it? Lawyers cost money,

you know." Then he added significantly: "Can-not I offer my advice, Mrs. Bellairs?"

"Next to lawyers, Mr. Bonwit, I admit I have a great respect for bank men," she returned tactfully. "But I must consult a lawyer."

"Oh, in that case, I can introduce you to the best man we have in town." He pushed a button; Peters entered. "Peters," he directed, "go to Major Holbrook's office and ask him to come over here right away."

In a remarkably short space of time, Major Holbrook—a grizzled gentleman with an iron-grey moustache, dressed in a grey suit ornamented with a red necktie—entered the room. Upon him sat the air of a man-about-town. He started slightly when he perceived the woman.

"This is Major Holbrook," said Mr. Bonwit. "He is our lawyer, and the best in town. Major, Mrs. Bellairs desires to consult you upon business."

The Major glanced calmly from the flushed face of Mr. Bonwit to the immobile countenance of his new client.

"Does she wish to consult me here?" the Major inquired.

"Yes . . ."

"No," interposed the woman quickly.

So it was settled that Roxane should accompany Major Holbrook to his office, a short distance down the street, where she proceeded at once to inform him that her husband, in his lifetime, had always believed that the best investments lay in properties in towns or cities within a radius of twenty-five miles from New York.

The Major sniffed with some slight business excitement, for he saw a chance for a big fee, or a series of big fees.

"Do you mean to infer that that is your object in coming to our city?"

"My husband," the lady went on, with a growing simulated interest, "saw your city and liked it. He told me it was the coming city of your state, and I—I, somehow, know it, feel it, even though I have been here only a short twelve hours. Who was it that said 'cities have a character of their own just like human beings'? That is it, no matter who said it. And what a difference I have found in the atmosphere of this place compared with that of other places I have known, especially for the last three years! It was, indeed,

the character of your city that attracted me—and my initial impressions rarely play me false.”

The Major was glad to note that however business-like Mrs. Bellairs’ husband may have been, that she herself was far from being business-like; that even as the city had made its impression upon her, he, too, was making a favourable impression, his every look, word, and gesture being followed by her glance.

“But what is it, dear madam, that you desire of me?”

Roxane leaned across the desk, and said in a way that left no doubt in his mind that she placed her entire confidence in him:—

“Simply see that my husband’s money is properly invested here in your town—see that nobody cheats me out of it.”

Major Holbrook nodded with professional interest.

“Mrs. Bellairs,” he said, referring to her card, “may I ask where your husband’s money is invested?”

“Ah, it is that old Gaspard, of Quebec, who has charge of everything!” returned the young widow with an impatient shrug of the shoulder.

"And who is Gaspard, may I ask?"

Again Roxane shrugged her shoulder.

"He's a solicitor, a counsellor, one like you."

She smiled and held up her hand with an expressive gesture. "No, not like you," she corrected; "not tall, not robust, not *distingué*; oh, no, not that! But of the profession—yes!"

With difficulty, the Major concealed his amusement; nevertheless, he asked:—

"Then, it is this lawyer Gaspard who has charge of your affairs?"

The young woman smiled; but an expression of annoyance crossed her face as she replied:—

"He has altogether too much to say, my friend, and does as he sees fit."

"Is he trustee?"

"He's everything," she told him, with another shrug.

"And he's perfectly safe?" queried the lawyer.

Roxane made a little moue.

"So safe, my friend, that he will not let me spend my own money. He is what you call 'tight.' But honest—oh, as honest as the day is long! But, then, he's under security, administrators' bonds, or whatever you call them. Oh,

yes, he's safe enough! But we shall get it all—all of my estate out of his hands, out of Quebec."

"Then, you wish me to . . ."

Roxane quickly cut in with:—

"To write a letter. One of those hard, stern letters that go with those brave moustaches of yours, and tell this old Jules Gaspard that he must pay my income. I must have ready money."

"Your will shall be done," declared the Major, smiling. "And now, his address, please."

"But I must see this letter!" she cried out excitedly, at the same time laying an imploring hand upon his arm. "I must know that you have raked him well over the coals."

The Major touched a button, and, calling in his stenographer, rapidly dictated a somewhat stereotyped letter. In a few minutes the stenographer handed him a typewritten copy of it, which, in turn, Major Holbrook handed to his client to read.

"Oh, that is too easy! There's too much professional courtesy about it!" she exclaimed with a shake of the head. "No, Major Holbrook, that will not do. Won't you please dictate another?"

Thereupon the Major burst forth into an

epistle that seemed to burn the very paper. Couched in polite phrase, it did what his client requested: it raked Jules Gaspard fore and aft.

"Ah, that is more to the point!" announced the widow, with a bewildering smile. "We shall take this matter up, step by step, until we have succeeded. Be good enough to let me know when you have heard from M'sieu Gaspard," she concluded at the elevator, where Major Holbrook left her.

Once more in her luxurious apartments in the Indian Queen Hotel, Roxane sought out from her massive baggage a little leather steamer-trunk, unlocked it, threw back the cover, and removed from a remote corner a leather kit that had been carefully tucked away. Of all the possessions that Roxane could boast of, this little leather kit was the one she prized most highly, but it also was the one she boasted of the least. And now, after carefully locking the doors, she proceeded to draw down the shades, and, in the dim light, opened this holy of holies, glancing upon its contents with undisguised admiration. From it she extracted first a rubber stamp, then a miniature typewriter, a bewildering assortment of pens, a bottle of red

and blue-black ink, an envelope, a heavy, handsomely engraved sheet of business letter-head, and finally a long, narrow bank cheque—the cheque of a Quebec bank. The letter-head bore the name of Jules Gaspard, Solicitor and Attorney-at-Law, Notary Public, Quebec; and to one side, in squarely blocked letters, appeared the words: “The Bellairs Estates.”

Rapidly she placed the sheet of paper in the typewriter, and as rapidly wrote a brief but pointed note, which she signed in a small but masculine hand; then she filled out the cheque, and, with the rubber stamp, quickly stamped it across the face, countersigning it with red ink. And now, folding the cheque and letter with scrupulous care, she thrust them into the envelope and sealed it; and, finally placing the latter within a larger envelope, she addressed this to Jules Gaspard, Quebec, P. Q.,—Jules Gaspard, whose office consisted of one room, one desk, and one chair, whose ancient, worn, and weather-beaten shingle creaked upon its hangings and flapped to and fro in the wind.

Roxane Bellairs had said that Jules Gaspard was honest; but she did not say that he was hon-

est for the reason that no client ever crossed his portal, no funds were ever placed in his hands, that his fondness for cognac and Canadian brandies had reduced him to a stage where he knew but one lesson, though he knew that lesson well. Likewise, she did not mention that his only task—which earned him the few dollars per week that made his life worth living—was to receive the letters which she sent to him, and, after removing their outer envelope, to attach a stamp to the inner one and promptly put them in the general post-office in the City of Quebec. Such was Jules Gaspard, whose fame for tightness in various particulars was quite unequalled, and in whose hands the funds of the Bellairs Estates, such as they were, were undoubtedly safe.

It was about three days later that Major Holbrook telephoned to Mrs. Bellairs at the Indian Queen Hotel that he had received a letter that would interest her.

“Ah, my friend, I see it in your eyes,” she said on entering the Major’s spacious offices; and, pressing warmly the hand which the Major held out to her in greeting, she added: “You have news from this Gaspard, have you not?”

The Major chuckled. He was not only glad to please her, but he was glad to have his first effort, in her behalf, a very considerable success. And, tossing before the dancing eyes of his lovely client an envelope postmarked Quebec—a letter upon a heavy sheet of business paper, and a long, narrow cheque,—he answered:—

“I think we fetched him.”

Roxane glanced at the envelope and read the letter through with studied carelessness. It said:—

HON. J. T. HOLBROOK,

Counsellor at Law.

Honoured Sir:—Mme. Bellairs must understand once and for all that I, the close friend and business associate of her late husband, shall administer the affairs of his estate in the manner that shall best conserve her interests. It is for her benefit, not for her pleasure that I act. I know, and she does not. She is extravagant—a spendthrift. You will find enclosed, Honoured Sir, a cheque for a small portion of her income for the present year. Mme. Bellairs will understand that this portion is all that can be vouchsafed to her at the present time. The bulk of her income she will not get for some months. Kindly give me advice as to its receipt. I remain, sir,

Your obedient servant,

JULES GASPARD.

“Thirty thousand dollars!” she exclaimed, her eyes flashing. “The idea! It is not enough!

Major Holbrook," she went on, tapping her dainty foot excitedly, "this won't do. No, it's not enough—Jules Gaspard must be made to pay . . ."

Major Holbrook blinked his eyes; perfunctorily he nodded in response to her vehemence; but in the back of his head there kept running through his brain a phrase that he had plucked bodily out of the letter: "the bulk of her income she will not get for some months." He eyed his client—a small fraction of whose yearly income was represented by a certified check for thirty thousand dollars—with undisguised astonishment. What was the sum-total of the yearly income of the Bellairs Estates? What did the principal amount to? Major Holbrook could only wonder and surmise; some day he would know.

"Ah, well," said the widow, rising, and once more pressing the Major's hand, "we will leave old Gaspard alone for the present. We must consider his age and the state of his nerves; is it not so? I thank you, Major Holbrook, and, if you will send me your bill at once, I'll . . ." Which injunction, by the way, the Major did not obey.

Now, any other person in the town of M—— having in his or her possession a certified cheque for thirty thousand dollars, would have taken the cheque to a bank and deposited it to his or her credit; but not so Roxane. Instead, she quietly returned to her apartments in the Indian Queen Hotel, and once more locked herself within.

"Some day," she said to herself, drawing from her dressing-table a dainty little packet of gold-tipped cigarettes ornamented with the Bellairs crest, "I must teach the ladies of this town how to enjoy a cigarette. For the present . . ." She broke off suddenly and rolled the certified cheque for thirty thousand dollars into a quill, lit it with a match, and watched it burn down almost to the end before igniting her tiny cigarette.

As she languidly blew up rings of smoke into the air, she smiled to herself at the thought of what she had accomplished that morning with a little rubber stamp.

CHAPTER IV

MR. BONWIT UNDER BONDS

IT was one of Mrs. Shackleton's big nights. The rooms were crowded; the dance was on; the joy was unconfined; and Mrs. Tony, triumphant and resplendent in her superb ivory-white satin gown, as she stood close to the entrance smilingly greeting her guests, could not refrain from telling herself that, before very long, her entertainments would be as famous as those of the great houses in the nearby metropolis.

In the unusually spacious conservatory—which for this particular night had been transformed into a veritable South American jungle—occasional glimpses could be had of beautiful women flitting back and forth under the soft lights; the agreeable confusion of many voices filtered in from the dancing-room; the melody of stringed instruments drifted in from the veranda; but Mr. Bonwit had no ears for the voluptuous music, nor eyes for any one save the beautiful widow Bellairs.

For the last few months Roxane had had every-

thing that she had wished for. But how she had lived, or upon what, the good people of the town never knew or never asked. Her intimate friends, however,—and she had made not a few,—learned, bit by bit, that the settlement of her extensive estate, still long delayed, was not far off. That she had arrived socially, her presence this evening at the Tony Shackletons' was sufficient evidence. Indeed, it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that she had the town practically at her feet—she had become the fashion.

" . . . the happiest man in the world, . . . the loveliest woman in the universe," murmured Mr. Bonwit, as with his none too strong right arm he pressed the dainty head of the widow to his breast, his left hand clasping her bare white shoulder.

Roxane lifted up her face to his and looked him in the eyes—a glance of suppliant appeal that lifted him into the seventh heaven of delight.

"I want to tell you something, dear," she said, clinging to him feverishly, insistently, ecstatically. "something that you must believe. It is true," she went on in low musical tones that sent the life surging through his veins, "that, although I've

been married once before, this is my first love affair."

"I believe you," he answered seriously; "I somehow knew it without your telling me." His voice trailed off into a subdued tremolo: "To think that you are mine, mine . . . !"

Presently Roxane drew him to a seat beneath the palms, whose delicate spears thrust themselves everywhere in great profusion; and, taking both his hands in hers, she continued:—

"Yes, I want to be yours, all yours, as necessary to you as your daily bread. I want to sink myself in you, dear, and be loved by your people and your friends . . ." She broke off abruptly, releasing herself suddenly from his embrace.

"What's the matter, dear?" queried Mr. Bonwit, somewhat alarmed at the change in her countenance.

Roxane did not answer. Her perturbation was brought about not because of her discovery of the identity of a man and a woman who—unseen by Bonwit and well-nigh hidden from every other eye save hers—sat at the other end of a clearing—

unseen through the centre of the vegetation, by some strange circumstance, was di-

rectly in front of her; she had seen them together on the first day of her arrival; what rendered her almost speechless with surprise and excitement was the expression that she had detected on the face of the girl looking into that of her companion.

Again Mr. Bonwit inquired, anxiously, the cause of her unusual excitement.

"Oh, it's nothing—nothing at all, dear," she said, seizing his hand in hers and pressing it firmly. "Can't you understand that I'm in love—in love for the first time?"

And love, even if it were soon to take the form of jealousy, there certainly was in the eyes of Roxane as she gazed not at Mr. Bonwit, but at the man engaged in an intimate conversation with the woman at the end of the little green passageway of palms.

But it was the girl, as has been said, and not the man, that had caused Roxane so much concern. There was something written on the face that she was watching that she had never seen there before: a glory in the eyes that never comes but once—love. And there was another surprise in store for her: for, at the moment when she was reflecting to herself that it was too bad that the

girl's feelings should be trifled with in this manner, her glance strayed back to the man—now bending over the girl,—and Roxane perceived, to her amazement, that his face, too, was lit up with like glory. No wonder her brain reeled: never had he looked at her like that.

And now alert, and with all the jealous instinct of her sex, Roxane drew breath sharply inward and started to her feet; but, the next instant, she sank down into her seat, covering her face with her hands, and began to laugh hysterically, her whole attitude presenting what seemed to the wondering Mr. Bonwit a picture of despair. Quickly recovering, however, and the better to explain her conduct, and, perhaps, because she needed to find some outlet for her feelings, she drew Mr. Bonwit's head down until the two at the other end of the little passageway came within the range of his vision, and then she whispered lightly in his ear:—

“We are not the only culprits, dear friend. Cupid is busy, is he not? He has flown from us to them.”

“They didn't see us,” began Mr. Bonwit sheepishly. Then he recognised the pair, and his honest countenance broke into a smile. “Well,

if it isn't Dorothy Paget and Kitt St. John!" he exclaimed. "Looks as if they were in earnest, too." And so deep was his tone of conviction that Roxane found herself starting once again.

"Do you really think so?" she demanded, clutching him by the arm. "Why, it can't be possible . . . ! It should be stopped—stopped at once."

"Why?" queried Bonwit, puzzled.

"It should be stopped," repeated the widow firmly. "Why, he's not good enough for her—some good friend—you, for instance—should interfere. Really, if you don't, I . . ." She broke off suddenly; then, in a trice, her mood changed. "Have you any idea," she whispered guiltily, "how long we've been sitting here? Why, it must be hours . . ."

"Hours that passed like minutes, dear," he ventured, smiling.

"Faster than that," she answered, sighing. "Oh, life has been so—so dreary until . . ." She paused, her eyes glittering as once more she glanced at St. John.

Roxane had been quite right in her diagnosis of the feelings of at least one of the two persons

upon whom her attention had been focused, for Dorothy Paget had suddenly come to realise upon this night how much she cared for Kittredge St. John.

That she had deliberately avoided him, continuously snubbed him, and frankly disliked him for many months, now made no difference in this sudden upheaval of her nature.

There was one thing above all others that he had said to her that night—for he did not then declare his love—that clung to her memory ever afterwards.

"No matter what happens, Miss Paget, I want you to believe in me," he had told her earnestly.

"Will you promise me that?"

And her eyes, though abashed by the love she had seen in his, nevertheless had clung to his face.

"But I do believe in you," she had answered softly—and that was all.

Meantime, Mr. Bonwit had succeeded in recapturing the widow's attention, and was saying something that sounded like music to her ears.

"My dear Roxane, you must forgive the stupid love-making of an old fossil like myself. There is one thing, however, that I wish to do to con-

vince you of my affection. You won't be surprised or offended to receive, to-morrow morning, a package from Solomon & Brown's?"

She smiled shyly and looked at the third finger of her left hand.

"Solomon & Brown's! Why, they're not jewellers."

"Oh, the ring! I'll get that fast enough," he told her, smiling. "I mean," he went on, "that I've transferred to you a little batch of Tri-State bonds—twenty thousand dollars' worth or more—a sort of pre-nuptial gift, you know."

"But, my dear man, you should not have done that!" she exclaimed, apparently annoyed.

"Why not?" he insisted. "I wanted you to know, to feel, even before we were married, that what's mine is yours. I want you to realise that now," he went on eagerly, as though he could not bear the thought of a refusal. "It won't be long now, anyway, before our wedding, Roxane."

"But what shall I do with these—these bonds, did you say?" was the woman's ingenuous question. "I don't need money—indeed, I do not, dear," she added, closing her eyes in order to

thank whatever gods she worshipped for this welcome dispensation.

"Of course, you don't—I know that. But you'll take them, dear, take them to please me? Put them away in your safe-deposit vault, anything. Surely, you understand how I feel about it."

She held out her hand and pressed his.

"I do understand, and I shall receive it in the spirit you give it, never fear."

On the top floor in the smoking-room, Jerome Olyphant and his bosom cronies—Major Holbrook and little Archie Varnum—struggled into their overcoats, disposed of their last cocktail, and lit fresh cigars.

"Now, where in thunder is that man Bonwit?" commented Olyphant genially. "We were all going to sit in a friendly little game that I fixed up down at the Iroquois, and we were going to quit here about midnight, and start there at one. Here it is half-past two, and no Bonwit! Now, where the deuce is he?"

Archie Varnum drew down the corners of his mouth.

"Don't you know?" he queried. "Well, come on, overcoats and all, and we'll find out!"

Halfway down the stairs Olyphant caught him by the arm.

"You don't mean to say that he's . . ."

"What, Bonwit! Ridiculous!" spluttered Major Holbrook. "She'd have nothing to do with him—a man of his years!" Which opinion was heartily endorsed by Olyphant.

Notwithstanding, regardless of the conventions or of waltz or two-step, they pushed their way through room after room; no one had seen Bonwit. A fair *débutante* suggested that they try the orchids, which, however, they did not do. For no sooner had the words left her lips than Dorothy Paget, unusually calm, save for a glitter in her eye, emerged from one entrance of the big conservatory, while almost immediately Kittredge St. John, his face still feverish and flushed, made his way in from another and stepped forward into the midst of his friends—Varnum, Holbrook, and Olyphant.

They hailed him with glee.

"St. John, what's become of Bonwit?" queried Olyphant, the spokesman of the party.

"The last I saw of him he was with Mrs. Belairs," answered St. John with a significant smile.

"But he was to join us in a game! Suppose you take his place?" suggested Olyphant.

The four men strolled to the Iroquois Club, sought the card-room, and started in to play. But, for some reason or other, the men were much less absorbed in the game than was usually their wont.

"He must be fifty at least," came from Olyphant while the cards were being dealt. It was not necessary for the name to be mentioned in order that the friends should know about whom the broker was speaking.

"Fifty-five, if he's a day!" declared the Major irritably.

"Old enough, at any rate, to make an ass of himself," was another contribution of Olyphant's.

"Well, by thunder," insisted Varnum, "it looks to me as if he'd got her! Or, rather, she's got him, which, needless to say, is a very different thing."

Finally the Major slapped his cards down upon the table and started up, saying:—

"I've got to quit—I can't play. I don't mind

saying that I've got the lovely Mrs. Bellairs on my brain to-night. How about you, Kitt?"

They all turned to St. John.

St. John smiled soberly.

"It's not the widow that I'm thinking of," he said evasively.

St. John lived at the Elberon, a few blocks down the street, and he and little Varnum, whose home was around the corner from the Elberon, started off together. As they reached the Elberon, Varnum suddenly turned to St. John and held out his hand.

"Kitt," he said, "I've got a confession to make to you—one that I hope you'll be glad to hear. Do you know that, for months and months, while all the town was taking off its hat to you, I didn't like you? Don't ask me why—I didn't, that's all."

Kittredge St. John shrugged his shoulders.

"Considering that I've never liked myself any too well, I'm not surprised . . ."

"But I was wrong," said Varnum, his pressure deepening upon St. John's hand, "and the town was right. Now, I want to be your friend, your very best friend, if I may, and if there's ever anything that I can do, anything at all, remem-

ber . . .” The little fellow broke off in embarrassment, for he was hopelessly in love with Dorothy Paget, and instinctively he felt that he had little hope of success, with St. John in the running.

“Thank you, old boy. You’re more than kind. I shan’t forget your words.”

As Varnum rounded the corner toward his home, St. John stood for a moment looking after him, then plunged into the brilliant light of the Elberon, and took the elevator to his apartments.

Five minutes had not elapsed after his entrance when there came a knock upon the door. To his “come in,” a bell-boy entered and handed him an envelope. It was addressed in the handwriting of a woman; he tore it open hastily and withdrew its contents—the blank half of a postal-card.

With a puzzled, interested look upon his face, St. John tossed the card and envelope upon his chiffonier, then he turned out the lights, and went to bed.

CHAPTER V.

DUPES

MAJOR HOLBROOK, the astute and genial counsellor at law of the Town of M——, sat very much at ease with all the world. His feet were cocked up upon the table and he leaned far back in his revolving-chair.

He was musing pleasantly upon the pleasures of the night before. "The Tony Shackletons certainly know how to dig out a good time for us all," he said to himself. "And, as for Roxane Bellairs . . ." His thoughts trailed off into a reverie. He wondered what the town would say if he and the fascinating widow should make a match, wondered what the future would hold for him with a woman like her at his side, to say nothing of the Bellairs millions! His thoughts were interrupted by the door being gently opened; he looked up to see a woman entering.

In an instant the Major forsook his undignified position, dropped his neatly-shod feet to the floor, and drew himself upright.

"Well, if it isn't Mrs. Bellairs!" he exclaimed, a happy smile on his face. "Why, I was just thinking of you!"

"A penny for your thoughts," she said, taking a seat near the window,—for her face was one that could stand the test,—where the full light of the sun fell upon her.

The Major flushed slightly.

"It takes a good deal of courage, sometimes, to tell one's thoughts. I wonder," he went on, drawing closer to her, "I wonder if I dare . . ."

"Last night, at the Tony Shackletons', you might have dared, but . . ."

"Last night!" he broke in grumblingly. "What opportunities did I have—why, only once did I catch sight of you, and then this Bonwit . . ."

Roxane laughed a merry laugh and looked the Major bewitchingly in the eyes.

"This Bonwit," she repeated, imitating his tone perfectly. "Well, what about Mr. Bonwit?"

"U'm," said the Major, settling himself into his seat. "Suppose you tell me something about Bonwit?"

Roxane shrugged her shoulders expressively;

for answer she delved into her little handbag and drew forth a flat package tied with red tape.

"There," she said, tossing it over lightly toward him, "there are eighteen one-thousand-dollar Tri-State bonds. Won't you count them, please?"

"Why count them?" he returned with a smile. "Your word . . ."

"No, no," she said with a shake of the head; and, deftly seizing the bundle, untied the knot, and laid before him, one after the other, the eighteen bonds—bonds that she had received that morning by special messenger from Philander Bonwit.

"They're gilt-edged, my dear Mrs. Bellairs. But how does it happen that you did not consult me about this investment?" he asked with some show of the annoyance he felt. "Whom did you consult?"

"Now, my dear Major, you must not get too curious," she answered with a tantalising little laugh. "I should like to borrow upon these bonds," she went on, smiling. "May I?"

The Major still looked annoyed.

"But, my dear Mrs. Bellairs, why do you come

to me?" There was elaborate protest in his voice. "Why did you not go to—well, I believe we were talking about Mr. Bonwit, were we not? Why did you not go to Bonwit?"

The Major's voice was so intensely authoritative that Roxane drew herself up a little and gave him a slightly resentful glance before answering:—

"For a very good reason, my dear Major—because I knew that you would refuse me nothing; Mr. Bonwit might . . ."

The Major sniffed suspiciously.

"Before we go any further, let me ask you a question. Is there anything between you and Bonwit?"

Roxane tightened her lips, pouted petulantly, gathered up her bonds, tied them with the red tape, and returned them once more into her bag.

"If you will not talk business, Major Holbrook," she said with a suddenly repressed manner, "why, then, I'll have to say good-morning."

The Major looked hard at her; she seemed to be on the point of open warfare. So, before she had reached the door, he called her back, promising that he would confine himself to business, if

she would consent to talk about themselves later.

Roxane returned slowly, an indulgent smile on her face.

"Well, then, let's see how well you can talk business," she said, settling herself once more at the desk; and again she drew forth a package tied with tape, and tossed it before him on the desk—a package that was the counterfeit presentment of the other, and that, while it seemed to consist of eighteen bonds, in reality could boast of but two: one bond on the top, and another on the bottom, and sandwiched in between were sixteen documents worth exactly the paper they were written on—and nothing more.

"How much do you want, Mrs. Bellairs?" asked the Major, hardly glancing at the package.

"Ten thousand dollars," she returned in a distinctly persuasive voice.

"Why not eighteen thousand?" he suggested.

"The bonds are selling at a premium."

Mrs. Bellairs found it difficult to frame an answer at once. At length she ventured:—

"No, ten thousand dollars is what I want, but I should like it in cash, if possible, right away."

And the Major, immediately seizing his cheque-book, wrote out a cheque for the required amount and passed it over for her to endorse.

"Oh, dear, it's on Mr. Bonwit's bank," she said protestingly.

"But what of that?" he demanded.

"Oh," she half-gasped, "I should prefer that Mr. Bonwit knew as little as possible about my affairs, Major Holbrook."

The Major's eyes flashed hopefully.

"He is not persecuting you with his attentions—making himself disagreeably attentive; is he, Mrs. Bellairs?"

The widow looked down and sighed.

"Don't ask me, Major Holbrook. I merely say to you that I could not go to Mr. Bonwit." She stopped a moment, and then, through lids that seemed to veil her glance, rendering it all the more subtle and fascinating, she went on: "Let this matter be between ourselves—just you and I . . ."

And Roxane Bellairs was successful in her efforts. Five minutes later she had shut her little handbag with a final click; inside of it reposed ten thousand dollars in one-thousand-dollar bills!

"You have done me a service, my dear Major, that I shall not soon forget," she said as she left.

Later that day Roxane paid a visit to Archie Varnum, the little stock-broker, St. John's friend.

Varnum was quite as pleased to see her as had been the Major, though his reason was of a different nature.

"Am I to understand, Mrs. Bellairs, that our friend the president of the Manufacturers' National is to be congratulated?" he hazarded, after some brief reference had been made to the entertainment of the night before.

Roxane laughed in spite of herself. It was as if the mention of Mr. Bonwit was a subject that amused her. At any rate, it gave Varnum the immediate impression that Mr. Bonwit had essayed to win the widow, in his clumsy way, and had failed. So that Varnum, like his visitor, at once became amused; but, unlike the Major, he saw that the widow was bent upon business, and he proceeded immediately to the matter in hand.

Again the little handbag was brought into requisition; and the widow—whom Varnum, together with every other resident of the town, knew

to be worth millions—laid before his gaze sixteen bonds of the Tri-State Road, as genuine as gold itself.

"My dear Mr. Varnum, could you, by any hook or crook, obtain for me or negotiate, as you call it, a loan this morning upon these bonds?"

"Why not sell them?" he asked. "Tri-State is in bully shape—this is the time to sell. I can sell them for you."

"Oh, but I don't want to do that! A loan is what I want."

"That's easy, too! What do you want—fifteen thousand?"

Roxane hesitated. For an instant she wondered vaguely to herself why she had not asked that amount of the Major?

"How much have you here on hand?" she asked, feeling her way cautiously.

Whereupon Varnum consulted his books. When he came back he suggested that he take her bonds over to Bonwit's bank, concluding with:—

"It won't take a minute."

"No, no, I don't wish you to do that!"

"The First National then, or the Federal Trust?"

"No. How much have you here, Mr. Var-
num?"

"About Thirteen Thousand—I can let you have
twelve of that as easy as not."

"In cash?"

"Why, yes, of course—only too glad to be of
service to you."

Roxane flushed at the sincere admiration in his
eyes, and in her embarrassment began to gather
up the bonds, tying carefully, though with studied
carelessness, the red tape about them; while Var-
num, looking down upon her, thought what an
attractive woman she was.

Suddenly, she looked up, and said with uncom-
promising candour:—

"Mr. Varnum, why is it that you never—never
make love to me? Oh, don't look frightened!
Not in earnest, of course. But don't you see that
then Mr. . . ."

"Bonwit would see that he had no show, is that
it?" he cut in, for Archie saw her point at once:
Bonwit was pestering the life out of her and she
wanted to put a stop to it. Therefore, without
waiting for an answer, he continued: "I see, you
want me to scare him off. But where would I

come in? Wouldn't they all be laughing at me?"

At once Roxane's face took on an expression of mock solemnity.

"And we wouldn't want that, would we, Mr. Varnum?" Then, with one of her quick changes, she became serious. "I don't mind telling you that I know your secret—know that you're in love with Dorothy Paget. But you are too self-effacing, not persevering enough, and you'll lose her if you don't look sharp." She paused a moment, wrinkled her brow, and then suddenly asked: "By the way, who is this Mr. St. John that he should come between you and her?"

Varnum's face clouded over for an instant before answering:—

"Since we are getting so confidential, Mrs. Bellairs, I may as well admit to you that I do love Dorothy Paget, but I love her far too well to force myself on her, especially when she makes it so evident that she prefers some one else—my friend, Kittredge St. John."

Roxane made a little gesture of impatience.

"I see," she said, looking him full in the face, "you need some one to help you. Why not let

me take possession of this intruder and give you your chance." The sudden hope that she perceived in his eyes affected her strangely; so that, when she bade him good-bye, it was with the most encouraging tone that she added: "But mind, Mr. Varnum, I shall expect you to succeed."

Entering a cab, Mrs. Bellairs drove down the street four blocks, turned two blocks west, and entered the building in which was Jerome Olyphant's office.

Olyphant welcomed her, so to speak, with open arms. Unfortunately, or fortunately, perhaps, Olyphant was not a bachelor, a fact, he had to acknowledge, that might easily bring about embarrassing situations. Nevertheless, he had little difficulty in persuading himself that in this case he ran no risks. And, far from thinking that any complications would be apt to grow out of his relations with the excellent Mrs. Bellairs, he was satisfied that the fact of his being a married man would merely lend additional spice to the routine of pleasure which the lady was pursuing so vigorously.

Moreover, it flattered him to have been singled out of all the staid old clubmen in the town as one

who understood the secret of the solution of the mystery of life. Furthermore, inordinately selfish as he was and almost a bankrupt, while his friends were all prosperous, it is no wonder that he secretly hoped that some of the Bellairs millions could find their way into his coffers.

When Roxane called he was expecting her, and, therefore, he made no attempt to disguise the pleasure in his welcome.

With Olyphant the widow's manner was quite different from what it had been with the others, whom she had boldly courted. But Olyphant needed no such stimulus; and she forced herself to be contented with an occasional blush and the effect that was to be best obtained by downcast lids.

"Mr. Olyphant," she began hurriedly, "my time is very limited. You have—you have the deed ready, have you not?"

Olyphant nodded, and said with a somewhat sober little smile:—

"I'm glad to see my little place go into such good hands. But, Mrs. Bellairs," he went on, the money question ever uppermost in his mind, "you are getting a bargain."

"Indeed, I know it," she answered gratefully. "To my mind, it's the only home in town. I searched high and low for something that suited me, until I saw your villa, and then I was determined that it should be mine."

Olyphant pressed his finger-tips together and frowned a troubled frown.

"If it were not for the fact that my creditors are—Well," he ran his fingers through his tousled hair, "it's a case of must or you couldn't have the Olyphant homestead at any price; that is, unless"—he added gallantly, his eyes brightening—"unless you happened to be a part and parcel of the consideration. But that, apparently, being out of the question . . ."

Roxane now glanced toward him with a look of archness, the subtlety of which claimed his attention for the moment.

"Why, Mr. Olyphant," presently she returned, her eyes opening wide, "of course, you must never forget that, although the place is mine, I shall always think of it as a place where its former owner has every right, shall be always welcome. Do not think yourself an evicted tenant, I beg of you."

Olyphant, at these somewhat unexpected words,

was about to seize her hand and make some unwise avowal, but she stopped him.

"I owe you, Mr. Olyphant," she exclaimed briskly, "just \$16,000; do I not?"

"Right," said Olyphant. "The purchase-price is \$21,000—the mortgage on the place remains at \$5,000.—You're to sign this bond and mortgage for \$10,000 of the purchase money, and you owe me \$6,000."

Roxane quickly drew forth a roll of large bills from her purse, saying:—

"Mr. Olyphant, I don't suppose it will make any difference to you if I give you one thousand dollars cash, and my note for thirty days for the remaining five thousand dollars?"

Olyphant stiffened. His business caution came to his aid, and, for the moment, he wondered whether such a course would be safe. The situation was so unusual; however, immediately he found himself nodding a quick assent.

"Why, certainly, Mrs. Bellairs," he said. "Your word would be enough, and, of course," he went on with an imitation of her manner, "you know if you should not meet your note, why I might come up there and take the place back. Ah,

if only I had known you fifteen years ago!" he sighed.

"Perhaps your wish . . ." She stopped and quickly changed the subject. "You will take the note?"

Olyphant was about to answer her question in the affirmative; but instead he suddenly held up his hand, saying:—

"Just a moment, Mrs. Bellairs."

Roxane was all smiles; he passed out of the room, ostensibly to seek a blank form, closing the door behind him. In the next room he proceeded to call up Mr. Bonwit. It was like him to wonder whether he had not blundered in saying that he would take the check and note. For Olyphant was Olyphant, and always would be, even where fascinating widows were concerned, and the bee of caution was buzzing insistently in his brain. "I'd best make sure," he told himself as he took up the receiver.

For some time there was no response. Then suddenly Bonwit's breathless voice leaped from the midst of the murmurs of the wire.

"Hello, old man, this is Olyphant."

"Oh!" gasped Bonwit, "you're in luck to catch

me. Been on the jump all the afternoon—just stepped in here this minute. What's up, Olyphant?"

Olyphant lowered his voice.

"It's confidential," he returned. "I'm closing a little deal with Mrs. Bellairs."

"What?" cried Bonwit in astonishment.

"Yes," laughed the other. "Never mind what it is." Then Olyphant thought he would risk it. "She does not want you to know, Bonwit. But, look here, I'm taking her cheque, do you see—for one . . ."

"Dollar?" laughed Bonwit.

"Thousand," answered Olyphant. "And it's a queer thing to ask—ridiculous, I grant you, but it's business—she's good, isn't she?"

Bonwit at the other end of the wire absolutely snorted.

"Good—as gold," he answered; and rung off.

And still Olyphant was unaccountably uneasy. He got Major Holbrook on the wire.

"Look here, Major," he said, "I'm closing a little deal with Mrs. Bellairs."

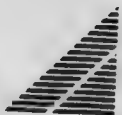
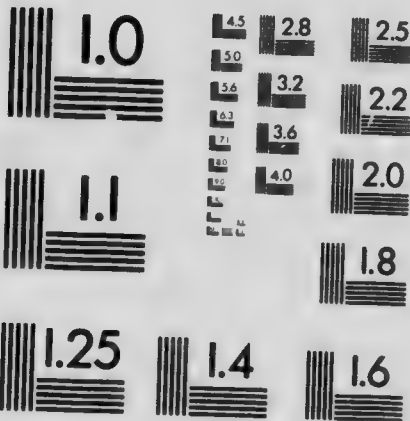
"What?" cried the Major in astonishment.

"What's the deal?"



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"I'm selling her my little bijou of a place on Chatham Road, and what I want to find out is whether I am safe in taking her note for thirty days?"

"How much is the note?"

"Five thousand."

"Her note is good for five hundred thousand," called back Holbrook. "But what I can't understand is, why she does this without consulting me?"

"Oh, I forgot! She told me not to mention it, and particularly not to you," responded Olyphant. "Perhaps she intends to marry."

"Indeed!" was all that Olyphant heard over the phone; but, to himself, the Major was saying while his face was wreathed in smiles: "The little minx didn't want me to know . . ."

"Much obliged, old man," concluded Olyphant.

"You can't go wrong on that," were the Major's final words. And hanging up the receiver, he seated himself before his desk where, with eyes closed in blissful contemplation of the future, he murmured: "I wonder if Olyphant knows whom she's going to marry? But this purchase—this house—Oh, I see, she doesn't

want to tell me—wants to surprise me, I suppose."

While Olyphant, at the other end of the wire, as he walked away, was saying to himself:—

"Marry!" He chuckled. "It's little the Major knows. I know of one dear friend that Mrs. Bellairs will be pleased to entertain on Chatham Road."

And, when Mrs. Bellairs had departed, he, too, gave himself up to pleasant dreams.

That afternoon at five o'clock Roxane Bellairs stood at the P. R. & Q. station waiting for the Express to come in, and, glancing with undisguised affection into the face of Philander Bonwit, she said:—

"But where are my orchids?"

Philander smote his forehead.

"My dear, I forgot them. I was so busily engaged with other matters. By the way, you got a package from . . ."

"All aboard!" sang out the conductor.

"You must hurry out, dear!" she cried, for he had entered the Pullman car with her. "It would never do for you to be carried on."

"But that would be heaven!" he exclaimed, and then his brow clouded. "If it wasn't that our wedding-trip"—her eyes sought his for one brief instant—"if it wasn't that I'm going to be away so long next month, I'd go with you. But, as it is, . . ."

"As it is," she answered, "I shall soon be back. Until then—good-bye."

"*Au revoir*," he whispered. Mr. Bonwit was seized with an uncontrollable impulse to kiss her, but the car was too alive with curious eyes. Hastening to the exit, he swung out on the platform and watched, with wistful eyes, the train gather speed and recede into the distance.

"My wife to be," he said half-aloud, rapturously, "my life—Roxane. . . . This week will seem ten years."

CHAPTER VI

THE SLICK MR. ST. JOHN

THAT same evening in one of the higher-class apartment-hotels in a side street in Manhattan, Roxane Bellairs was waiting for St. John. There was an air of subdued expectancy about her. At every sound in the hall without she started visibly; she seemed to be struggling with the excitement of conflicting emotions. But, nevertheless, when the knock came on the door that told her that the expected visitor was actually about to enter, she controlled her impatience to rush forward, and allowed a second or two to elapse before she gave him permission to come in. He entered, smiling.

Kitt St. John's smile was no inconsiderable part of his engaging personality. There were those who could vouch for its appearance in moments of extreme peril; others remembered how wonderfully his face would light up when anything appealed to his keen sense of humour. But, whether he thought the present situation dangerous or

amusing, it served him now as a mask: it concealed, from the woman lying back languidly in a chair, putting a gold-tipped, lighted cigarette to her red lips, the fact that he was aware that something ominous was on her mind.

But, even as he advanced towards her, an indefinable change took place in her manner. For a moment she looked into his roguish eyes, then she said:—

“Kitt, dear, I have brought you sixteen bonds and money—plenty of it—over twenty thousand dollars, to say nothing of a deed.”

St. John watched the play of joyous thought as it passed over her beautiful features. To him the sum that she mentioned was absurdly small; but under no circumstances did he wish to give her any pain. But what should he say? Presently, cautiously feeling his way, he ventured:—

“But a deed to what, Roxane? What can we do with a deed?”

“A deed for Olypnant’s house—we can sell it, Kitt—get some broker to put the deal through. We can even do what we did in Los Angeles—sell it to half-a-dozen different people at one time.” She laughed lightly. “What a fuss there would

be when they all met at the Register's Office to record their deeds!" She checked her laughter abruptly: something in his manner told her that he was not satisfied. "But you don't seem pleased?" she asked. "Have I failed . . . ?"

"Failed! Nonsense, my dear girl!" he hastened to assure her. "But it would take a long time to make a haul with these people by your methods. You might make good in time—but the town is slow, the people in it conservative, cautious. You see, they've made their money in trade, have seen nothing. It would take time to educate them up to your—our standard, notwithstanding that you have the whole town at your feet."

"What good does that do to me since I have left there for ever?"

St. John looked at her sternly.

"But you have not left there forever. You're going back."

St. John took a cigarette from a box on the table, lit it, and puffed away at it coolly for a few minutes, glancing, with apparent complacency, at her bowed figure. Suddenly something in this attitude of hers smote his conscience, and he drew near to her.

"Why, what's the matter, Roxane? Brace up! Remember that our compact leads to but one end—you and I, down the ages, with a million." He placed a hand upon her shoulder; indignantly she broke away from him.

"How dare you, after last night!" she cried.

"Last night? What occurred last night?"

"You know very well what occurred." Her face was aflame now. "Don't try to evade me! I sent for you to tell you that I won't have you running after that woman Dorothy Paget."

"For Heaven's sake, Roxie, spare me to-night! You know perfectly well that I am only playing a game—a part of our game."

"Up to the last few weeks, yes," she declared. "But now—Oh, I saw her face last night! You are making love to Dorothy Paget in dead earnest—and she loves you. The game is getting too deep for you, Kitt."

St. John's eyes twinkled; this fit of jealousy seemed to please him.

"But two, evidently, can play at that game," he observed. "How about Bonwit and yourself—and am I jealous?"

"You know perfectly well how much I care for

Bonwit, Olyphant, and the rest. . . . Except for their money, I detest them all!"

But St. John was not through with jesting.

"How about society—they say that you've agreed to marry him in a month? If that's the case, why shouldn't I marry Dorothy Paget?"

"Marry her!" she echoed, flashing him an angry look.

"Why, yes," he proceeded coolly between puffs of his cigarette. "She's the richest girl in town. Here's the situation in a nut-shell: You marry Bonwit and get all he has, and I'll marry Miss Paget and get all she has. It won't necessarily have to be a long marriage, and then we . . ."

"Never!" snapped out Roxane, bringing her small hand down with great force upon a nearby table.

"Not even for a month?" he went on tantalizingly.

Roxane's anger vanished; she took refuge in tears.

"To think," she sobbed, "that you could talk to me like that. Yes, I've failed, miserably failed—all I've done—all I've got, I suppose, is hardly enough to keep us a few months."

St. John did not answer for a minute; when he resumed he had completely dropped his bantering tone.

"Now, look here, Roxane, will you stop this nonsense? I'm going to take a hand now. There's lots of money in that town—lots of money in the banks, lots of jewelry in the safe-deposit vaults, and I'm going to have some part of it. But you've got to believe in me—believe that whatever happens, no matter what it is, it is a part of the game."

Roxane looked up at him quickly. On her face was that confiding expression that rarely failed to induce men to give her what she wanted. Her disbelief in him was decreasing even as her curiosity increased.

"You are telling me the truth?" she asked.

"Have I ever deceived you?" he calmly returned.

"But you haven't told me what your plan is?" she demanded, ignoring his question and hoping to catch him off his guard.

"Now, Roxie, there's one thing that even you will have to acknowledge, and that is that Kitt St. John never told his plans and secrets yet to a

woman. It's a dangerous thing to do, and I'm not going to begin to do it at this stage of the game. You must let me go about things in my own way, and not interfere—so please don't ask me again. . . .” And, with these words, he picked up the deed lying upon the table and looked it over.

“By George, I'm glad you've got this place! It comes in fine just at this time! You need just such a place as this where you can entertain and . . .”

“But will you promise me,” she interrupted, “to stop paying attentions to that Paget girl, if I go back?”

“I can promise you nothing. Unfortunately, that Paget girl is one of the things that can't be avoided. You must believe in me implicitly.”

There was a pause in which he held her glance, held it until his had triumphed over hers, and then, singularly enough, she uttered the same words that two other people had uttered but a few short hours before.

“I do believe in you, Kitt,” was her earnest answer. After a little while she added: “How about money?” For a moment the eyes of both

the man and the woman longingly rested on the Tri-State Bonds; then the woman seized them and, tossing them to him, said: "They're all yours, Kitt, take them."

"No," quickly returned St. John. "I don't know nor do I care to know how you got them, but you had better keep them—the money and the bonds. We're running a big risk as it is. I must start my campaign at once. No—you keep them—I don't need them. There's one thing I must have, however,—that's a motor-car."

St. John rose; she clasped him excitedly about the neck.

"Will you promise me, Kitt, that, whatever this thing is that you are going to do, you'll get it over with as soon as possible? Then we'll—with whatever you get we can always manage . . ."

"Never fear, Roxie, I'll get away with what I'm after, all right, and it will be a million."

Slowly Roxane picked up the bonds and replaced them in her bag.

"And the motor you need?" she asked. "You propose getting it—in our usual way?"

St. John's knitted brows smoothed out and resumed their wonted humorous, whimsical lines.

"Most assuredly," he answered. "Why not?"

Roxane smiled in spite of herself at his unbridled confidence.

And so it happened that on the following morning two prosperous-looking individuals, a man and a woman, their automobile-goggles half-pushed across their foreheads, their clothes liberally sprinkled with dust—indicating recent motor rides—presented themselves at the office of Champenois et Cie. Their advent was welcomed with not a little pleasurable excitement by the dapper young agent of Champenois et Cie.; for, although Champenois et Cie. were specialists—their specialty being the "Hermes," a car that could travel seventy-five miles an hour and that sold for seventy-five hundred dollars,—not a few days had passed without any one having entered their office with a request even for a trial. It looked as if no one was looking for their car; the Hermes 1910 had become a drug on the market.

"We wish to see a Hermes," said the man, his voice a bit rasping and high, but extremely well-bred, and at the same time drawing down his motor-goggles further over his face. "That is,"

he added, turning to the woman beside him, "Mrs. Kerlin wants a racing-car."

"If I can ever find just what I want," spoke up the woman, likewise drawing her goggles down over her face; "but I don't believe I can."

"I'm sure I have the car that you want," answered the agent with a courage born of his conviction. "The Hermes '10 is the only car in the universe!"

"That remains to be proven," said Mrs. Kerlin, in a most business-like tone.

Ten minutes later, the Hermes 1910—a long, low, yellow car—thrust its nose into the Circle. Mrs. Kerlin was at the helm, her companion at her side, and the agent clinging tenaciously in the sole seat on the rear.

Slowly the woman drove the car across the town, slowly up the avenue until she reached more open country, and there, turning to the agent, she asked in a manner that left no doubt in his mind that she was more than a novice:—

"May I let her out?"

"Most assuredly," came back quickly.

Whereupon, Mrs. Kerlin immediately threw the car into third speed. Like a flash it darted

from one end of the long straight road to the other, the woman handling it perfectly. She rounded curves, climbed hills, reversed the machinery, and swung her car about time and time again with the touch of a veteran.

"There's nothing the matter with the Hermes!" she sang out with a note of admiration in her voice. "Isn't it always the way—we've tried every car in town, most, and we didn't find this until the last."

"I hope," said the agent eagerly, "that I may be able to . . ."

"Oh, I'll buy this car, all right," she broke in. "But I want this particular one—why, it has come to be a friend already."

Casually she asked the price; it satisfied her, for presently she went on in business-like tones:—

"I'll tell you what I'll do. I don't want to be in a hurry, but I can give you a hundred dollars on account to bind the bargain—to hold the car until Monday."

"It's your funeral, Madge," spoke up Mr. Kerlin, on the front seat. She had taken the initiative throughout; he, apparently, letting her go her way.

"Well and good, madam," replied the agent, delighted at having found so ready a customer.

She drove the car into town and drew up before the Sandringham on Seventy-second Street—a quiet, large, exclusive family-apartment house.

"If you will come in a moment, I will write a check," she told him; whereupon the three left the car. They had not gone more than a few feet, however, when she suddenly turned, exclaiming:—

"Why, you're not going to leave that car there alone!"

The agent looked uncertain. It was not wise, perhaps, to leave the fastest car in creation all by itself on Seventy-second Street, and he was about to make a suggestion that involved its safety when she forestalled him.

"Why, Dick," she said, turning to Mr. Kerlin, "you can take care of the car while I take Mr.—Mr.—in and make out the check; then he can take the car back to his garage, and Monday we can pay the rest in cash."

"I don't see why I should stay in charge of the blooming car . . ." grumbled the husband.

"You'll do just as I say," remarked his wife sweetly, with a glance toward the agent.

"I suppose I shall," grunted Mr. Kerlin; "I usually do." And so he climbed upon the seat, and threw one leg lazily over the other, while Mrs. Kerlin tripped into the Sandringham, the agent following at her heels.

"Now," she said, leading him into a little writing-room, "if you will sit here, I will go to my apartment and bring you down a check."

For a full half-hour that seemed like minutes the agent waited. He was feeling happy, for business had suddenly looked up, and so the time went fast. However, as time went on, he fell to musing upon the dilatory qualities of women in general and Mrs. Kerlin in particular.

He rose and paced the room. He would have looked out of the window, but there was none. Finally he strolled to the desk.

"Would you mind calling Mrs. Kerlin and say to her that I am waiting—the automobile agent, if you please. She has probably forgotten me."

"What name did you say?" inquired the clerk, pricking up his ears.

"Kerlin," answered the other, looking at the name upon a card that he held in his hand.

"Nobody here by that name," was the quick response.

"Perhaps she's a visitor," returned the other.

"Nobody here by that name," repeated the clerk, eyeing the agent suspiciously.

"That's queer," said the agent, alarmed.

"However, her husband is just outside—I'll go and ask . . ."

He left the Sandringham and started toward the husband, or, at least, where he was supposed to be; but there was no husband there; and, what is more, there was no car. That particular Hermes 1910 had disappeared completely from the face of the earth.

"What did they look like?" demanded the head of the house when the agent returned to the big garage.

"Why," stammered the man, "they looked like—why, she had a—why, he had—he was—why, hang it all, they had on goggles all the time and I don't know . . ."

And, accordingly, the description that headquarters got that night was somewhat vague.

Three days later, a long, low racer, painted grey, thrust its nose cautiously into Main Street

in the town of M—— just as day was breaking.

It was not a Hermes car, at least no one would have recognised it as such, nor was it a Mastodon, nor was it a Green Flyer. Some careful hand had deftly changed its outer appearance without altering its mechanism, so that it bore a faint resemblance to all three of these high-class cars, but resembled closely none. The man at the wheel, covered and begrimed with dust, in the same vague way bore some resemblance to Mr. Kerlin, late of the Sandringham, New York; as a matter of fact, he was none other than Kittredge St. John.

As the car passed the Indian Queen Hotel, a curtain was raised discreetly at the window in the Hobart suite, and a woman—who under certain circumstances might have looked like Mrs. Kerlin—peered cautiously from beneath the shade and smiled. This woman was Roxane Bellairs . . . the same who later in the day again appeared at the Major's office in response to her lawyer's summons.

"I have something for you, Mrs. Bellairs," he announced. "Guess what it is?"

"Your kind regards," she smiled.

"I have much more than that for you all the time," he went on, "but—look at this." He tossed her a slender piece of paper. "Your old friend, Jules Gaspard, has come to time again."

She took the piece of paper. It was another check for twenty thousand dollars, certified as before.

"Oh, well," sighed the fair visitor, "I suppose old Gaspard realises after all that one must live! But, my dear Major, don't let up on him for a moment."

CHAPTER VII

THE RICHEST GIRL IN TOWN

It was shortly after eight o'clock one evening, some days later, that a tall young man, wearing a long coat and an opera hat, strode through the rain and mist and ran lightly up the steps of a grey stone dwelling in the west end of the town. The butler knew and welcomed him as, unhesitatingly, and yet with a measure of embarrassment, he immediately removed his coat and passed into the room just off the hall. Although it was spring, there was a fire burning in the grate, and it felt good to him after all the damp and cold outside.

"Jove, what a night!" he said to himself, holding his hands toward the fire which at this juncture, blazed up as though in an effort to meet him halfway. "A bad night to be outside—a good night to be in."

A moment later, glancing carelessly about him, he perceived on a table an evening newspaper which, apparently, had not been read, for it lay

unfolded, face uppermost, its black headlines blinking at him in the uncertain light.

RICHARDS & RIPPLE ROBBED
Fourth Burglary of the Series
The Gang Still Unapprehended

"These fellows seem to be keeping it up," he mused to himself, smiling and stretching forth his hand towards the paper. Quickly, however, he withdrew it and turned his back upon the sheet and his face towards the fire, adding: "No, I had better stick to my rule. I've made my bed—by Jove! a comfortable one, perhaps, from one point of view, and I prefer to lie upon it. But, when I think of Dorothy . . ." He stopped short, a cloud resting upon his face.

Presently, he rested one shoulder against the fireplace and nervously stroked a short Vandyke beard.

"When I think of Dorothy," he repeated, laughing, but with just a trace of bitterness in his voice. "And when do I not think of her?" And once more he frowned and tugged at his moustache.

"But things cannot go on as they are. I must

tell her—not everything, of course, but enough to make her understand. She must, somehow, be made to understand before—before we go any further . . .”

For some time he stood reflectively gazing at the fire, his head bent and his hands thrust deep into his pockets, trying to find some way out of his difficulty.

“Yes, I’ve got to tell her . . .” he was saying to himself when a girl, descending the stairs, stepped lightly into the room—a girl, tall and slender, with straight eyebrows and frank, womanly eyes, her brown hair coiled turbanwise around her pretty head. She stood at the threshold for a moment, glancing smilingly at him.

“Kittredge . . .” she said, breaking in upon his thoughts.

The man turned like a shot. A slight frown had not left his face when he took the hand which she held out to him.

“Dorothy,” he began, “I wish you would do me a favour. If you don’t mind, I’d rather you’d call me by my first name.”

“Your first name?” she returned in amazement.

"Yes—it's Henry . . ."

"Henry—then, your name is Henry Kittredge St. John?"

"Yes—that's the name I bear."

She glanced up at him smilingly.

"But—but Kittredge is so much stronger; besides, I like it better," she insisted with a protesting blush.

He smiled indulgently.

"Possibly; but does it really make any difference to you—there's a reason in my suggestion."

She made a slight grimace.

"No—Henry, it does not," she replied with a laugh.

He bowed gravely.

"Thank you, Dorothy. Some time I will explain. . . ."

But the incident, slight though it was, had, for the moment, caused a slight embarrassment to spring up between them. In an endeavour to dispel it, the girl crossed the room, and, taking up the evening paper that was on the table, ran her eye over it.

"Goodness me, how these robberies continue!" she exclaimed. "I read all this stuff 'hrough this

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morning. But isn't it dreadful! Moreover, they say there is a lot that never gets into the papers!"

The man looked at her, seemingly inattentive to her remarks; he had, unconsciously, returned to the line of thought that she had interrupted. Surprised that he made no reply, the girl straightened up and said with much feeling:—

"But, Henry, there is some one—something that I must speak to you about—something I have a right to speak to you about."

St. John's heart almost stopped beating; his face turned very white.

"There is some one in this town—some one whom we both know . . ." She hesitated, torn between her desire to have it out with him and her fear that she might hurt him.

"Then you know . . ." he began.

"Know what?" Dorothy interrupted anxiously.

St. John forced a smile.

"That's what I was just wondering, Dorothy," he answered.

"I know," the girl put to him bluntly, "or rather I would like to know, just what there is between you and Mrs. Bellairs?"

The man looked at her interrogatively, and was about to speak when she cut in quickly:—

“No, wait; I must have my say. I know it's not true, Henry—that there's nothing in it; but I've watched her—watched you both, for that matter, at the Shackletons'; everywhere, in fact—and she always makes love to you openly.”

“Openly?” He smiled.

The girl caught his meaning, and, with difficulty, suppressed a smile as she went on to explain:—

“Openly to any one with eyes in her head. Now, Henry, isn't it so?”

“I remember one such occasion, possibly two,” he admitted half-seriously. “However, my eyes, apparently, were not open quite as wide as yours, for I don't recall anything quite so insistent as you mention.”

“I think I know when a woman is in love,” flared up the girl, dropping her eyes. She paused for a moment to gain control of her voice. When she went on there was still a slight quivering in it. “I know Mrs. Delairs is in love with you.”

St. John stood quite still. His eyes were fixed upon her face intently. Now he smiled at her.

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"But, I understand Mr. Bonwit . . ."

Dorothy shrugged her shoulders petulantly; while St. John made a mental note of the fact that he had never seen Dorothy in a mood like this before.

"Bosh!" came from the girl. "Can't you read this Mrs. Bellairs? Why, she's a born coquette—flirts with every man she meets! Except you, of course—with you she's in dead earnest. That's all I have to say, and I think," she concluded slowly, "that I have a right to say it."

"You've a right to say anything to me, Dorothy," he told her, looking at her out of thoughtful, troubled eyes, and wondering how long it would be necessary for him to lie or act lies. After a moment, he continued: "Let me ask a further confidence: Have you ever seen me returning her advances?"

The girl searched her memory carefully.

"Yes," presently she answered. "Weeks ago, before—before you came into my life as you did that night at the Shackletons' . . ."

St. John laughed outright at this.

"Are you sure that I made love to her?"

"Absolutely."

St. John's eyes twinkled in spite of himself.

"Dorothy, do you think you can tell when a man is lying?"

"I think I can tell when you speak the truth," returned the girl quickly.

"Well, then, let me tell you that I have never made love to Mrs. Bellairs, that I never shall make love to her," he declared with rather a rueful smile. "And what is more, no matter how much she attracts other men in this town, there is something about her that actually repels me. I won't attempt to explain it."

Dorothy paused a moment while she digested a doubt.

"And yet she has some unknown influence over you, some . . ."

"Appearances may be against me, but surely, Dorothy, you believe me when . . ."

The girl was very much touched.

"You—you love me?" she murmured, lowering her glance.

St. John started towards her, but suddenly halted.

"Yes," he replied in a tense, strained voice, "I love you. You knew it then?"

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She nodded, still with downcast eyes.

"I've known it all along, and I . . ."

"Dorothy, if only I could . . ." He stopped short, his voice breaking; presently he went on in tones of agonised entreaty: "Wait—wait until you have heard the rest—heard me out!"

The girl glanced at him in a startled sort of way.

"The rest?" she repeated.

"Unfortunately, yes," he responded in a low voice.

Again she searched his face; he stretched forth his arms, and just as quickly withdrew them, though there was encouragement in the voice that said to him:—

"But does anything matter now that we . . ."

"Nothing to me, Dorothy, unless it does to you."

Dorothy moved quietly over to the sofa, and motioned to him to take a seat beside her.

"Nothing can make any difference with me," she said slowly, measuring every word, "of that I'm sure. But about this something that you wish to tell me—it isn't about a woman, and it isn't about . . ." She broke off abruptly and added,

laughing: "Surely you haven't been doing anything wrong, such as robbing jewelry stores or anything of that kind; have you?"

He took the sheet which she waved carelessly before him, rose, and, without a word of explanation, dropped it quickly in the fire; it blazed up and made the room suddenly light; and not until the flame had died away did the man speak.

"I wonder, Dorothy, whether you can re .se what it means to be broke, to wander about the streets of a great city with no place to lay your head, day after day trying to get a job and never getting it, to become, in short, an outcast upon the face of the earth?"

His outburst was almost pathetic. The sight of this man, usually so self-controlled, with now not a trace left of his devil-may-care manner, caused the girl's puzzlement to grow.

"What a question to ask!" she said at length.

"Not such a question, if you stop to consider that it's a part of my life's history."

She looked at him doubtfully.

"Surely, Henry, you're jesting. . . ."

"On the contrary, it is all too true that I—a

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man, apparently without a care—have been through it all.”

The girl could not refrain from giving a little inarticulate cry. She made a movement to lay her hand upon his arm, but, though he noted the action with inward satisfaction, nevertheless he waved her back.

“No, no, not yet; you must wait until I have finished.”

With an effort, the girl remained silent; presently he went on:—

“What does the town know of Kitt St. John? Practically nothing. Some day”—he was speaking rapidly now—“some day I will tell you of something that I have done—a foolish thing, the thought of which has sometimes made me stand aghast. At first, it is true, I approved of it; but how many times since have I denounced myself for doing it! In a measure, I am reconciled to the situation, for, had I not taken the step, I probably would never have met you. Still that only complicates what was already too much complicated.”

“I’m afraid,” said the girl with a faint smile, “that I do not understand. Though I do under-

stand," she added gravely, "that to you it seems most serious."

"I wish I might tell you what's on my mind, but I must be somewhat vague. You see, it's largely a question of compact." St. John flushed a little and drew in a deep breath. "There is one thing more that I would like to ask you," he resumed after a moment. "Suppose that to-morrow I were to be stripped of every worldly thing that I possess; that I were to be jeered at by my friends even, are you sure that your feelings toward me won't be the same?"

Some note of battle in the man's voice, rather than the sentiment itself, caused the girl to reply with much feeling:—

"If that were to happen I would come to you—go with you to the ends of the world, if need be."

St. John took her in his arms and kissed her for the first time.

"Dearest girl," he murmured, "you make me thoroughly ashamed. A man should shield the name of the woman he loves from whatever ridicule may attach to his." And then, somewhat abruptly, so it seemed to the girl, he asked: "I

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believe it is not generally known that I have called here with any frequency?"

She answered with a shake of her head.

"It is better so—at least, for the present—that there be no formal engagement, nothing settled. I am asking much of you, dear one, altogether too much. But you can trust me? And you'll believe in me no matter what reaches your ears?" He laughed a bitter laugh. "I suppose millions of men have said all this before, and thought they meant it, too."

There was a moment's silence.

"Unfortunately," he resumed, "there are certain things I am forced to do. Often I cannot explain why I am obliged to be at—well, here, there, everywhere. But, if you can trust me, it's half the battle. More than that, it's all the battle."

"I can," returned the girl, and the light of a great affection shone in her calm, brown eyes.

"I suppose millions of girls have said that, too," she added in her turn, "and found out later their mistake. However, I don't want you to think that I am lacking in prudence or discretion or common-sense. Understand me, I'm dying of curiosity to know what all this mystery means."

Her eyes met his in a clear, straight glance. "But, Henry, I'm taking you on trust—yes, just this once I take you on trust. If you are deceiving me in what you say, or what you are," she concluded, glancing at him with a smile radiant with confidence, "why, I am deceived indeed."

"A little patience and I shall be free to claim you as . . ." He did not finish the sentence; instead, he stretched forth his arms and held her in one long embrace.

A few minutes later, with Dorothy at his side, he stepped into the hall and donned his long, black coat. He took from his pocket a gold, hunting-case watch, and, without opening the case, touched a small spring: it was a repeater, and it struck the hour.

"Half-past nine!" he ejaculated. "Great Scott, I'm due at the club now!"

A moment more and Kittredge St. John had passed out into the night.

For a long time after he had gone, Dorothy, alone where they had spent the evening together, sat musing before the glowing embers of the dying fire. She reviewed the history of the past few months and wondered whether she were not mak-

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ing a mistake. A peculiar thought was in her mind, one that, even whilst she harboured it, she endeavoured to dismiss as unworthy of her. But, why had he . . . ? Was he quite what he seemed . . . ? The sudden entrance of her maid into the room, asking whether she had not forgotten the hour, put an end to her musings.

"Goodness me!" returned Dorothy in some confusion; "I had no idea it was so late! What time is it, anyway?"

Whereupon the maid consulted a clock upon the mantel, and informed her mistress that it was precisely half-past twelve.

CHAPTER VIII

A PECULIAR COMBINATION

"WHAT a beastly night!" The exclamation fell from the lips of a tall young man in a long, dark coat—a coat that enveloped him completely—as he stood, for an instant, looking up and down the street. He had reached the corner just as the electric lights had gone out—a way they have of doing on stormy nights, the reason for which few men ever knew, and those few have forgotten.

If, however, he were waiting for a car, he was disappointed: in the distance, the faint light of an electric gleamed through the moisture; but it was receding, as is the habit of street conveyances.

"A beastly night," he repeated with the same easy nonchalance and as though it were the pleasantest of evenings. "So much the better," he went on in the same happy frame of mind; nevertheless, he drew his coat the closer about him and turned up the collar; then, removing his opera-

hat, he shook the rain from it and replaced it upon his head.

But, although the storm continued with unabated force, he did not seek shelter, but still stood upon the corner, for some four or five minutes, glancing repeatedly up and down the cross-streets, peering into the darkness to see what he could see, and thrusting his head forward and to one side to hear what he could hear; but he saw nothing and heard nothing; and, finally thrusting his hand into the depths of his long coat, he half-pulled out a watch.

He did not look at it for two reasons: first, because the rain might have ruined it; second, because it was too dark to see; instead, he pressed a small spring. It was a repeater, and it struck the hour.

"Quarter to one," he remarked softly to himself; "I'm just in time." Presently he continued: "That's a good watch—one of the best, I'll wager, in the old man's stock, and a first-class stock he carries, too, or did up to night before last."

He laughed noiselessly to himself, and then, with an upward glance at the corner building, he

moved over towards it, as though seeking shelter from the storm.

It was a bank—one of the old-fashioned kind, with a high corner stoop covered by the conventional species of portico.

Another man would have ascended this stoop and taken his stand under the portico, which furnished ample protection from the wet; but not so this man; instead, with unheard footsteps, he moved halfway down the length of the bank on the side street and paused in front of a ground-floor window. There were six windows on that side. He selected the third one after examining it with care.

As was the case with all the others, this window was barred with iron bars. They also were old-fashioned, somewhat wide apart, and ran from top to bottom with no supporting plate between.

Having completed his investigation, the man in the long coat straightened up and stood with his back to the window, and once more looked about him. It was a bad place to stand: the water from the roof poured down in a steady stream upon his head. He never heeded it, however, and, after

looking and listering for another instant, he merely wrapped a long scarf about his neck and drew his coat still more closely around him, and then stooped down only to straighten up again almost instantly, and with one heel he proceeded to tap-tap-tap upon the flag beneath; and, as he tapped, a rasping, grating sound that came from behind him reached his ears.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "What a boon these new automatic heel machines have come to be! The man that makes them deserves a place along with the inventor of the typewriter, the sewing-machine, and the cotton-gin. They do the business in no time, and do it well."

Suddenly there was a sharp, whirring sound, and then a loud snap.

"Number one!" he murmured, and again he stooped and made another adjustment.

Having done this, he once more examined the window and the bars; and, as he did so, a small gleam of light, that came from a tiny incandescent lamp held in the hollow of his palm, played around the bottom of one of the long bars—an

inspection that seemed highly satisfactory, for immediately he resumed his tap-tap-tapping.

In a little while there was another whir and another snap.

"Number two," he remarked in a tone of delight.

But scarcely had the words left his lips than, indistinctly upon the heavy moist air, came the steady tramp-tramp of a man around the corner; he immediately sprang aside with:—

"Great Heavens! What's that?"

An instant more and the man in the long coat took from his pocket a small piece of putty, filling the filed crevices with it; then, with a diminutive pepper-shaker, he dusted the edges with fine lead-pencil scrapings to restore to them a metallic appearance; finally he blew away the iron filings and noiselessly disappeared.

The watchman—for it was he—came around the corner, tried the front door, then flashed his light in turn into and upon each window. All was well. He stood for a moment, glancing up and down, swore under his breath at the rain and the mud, shook his stick energetically at the motor-

man of a trolley-car that thundered by, and then passed on.

Two minutes later the man in the long coat was back at his post, and the rasping sound began again. At the end of twenty minutes he breathed a sigh of relief.

"Number four!" at last he was able to announce to himself.

He had cut two bars completely through, both at the top and at the bottom, which he quietly removed and gently laid down upon the pavement.

The window also was an old-fashioned one, consisting of two sashes, with a middle catch. It would have been a simple thing to force the catch, but this man knew better. Holding his body as a shield against the framework, he flashed his light along each edge—and particularly along the middle—and then cut two small holes in the glass, and, inserting an instrument, cut a number of wires that ran around the sash.

"Blamed idiots!" he muttered to himself. "These people leave their wires in plain sight. This is a cinch!"

And now, having cut the wire, the rest was easy. He slipped the catch, raised the lower sash, and entered. From the inside he carefully replaced the bars in their former position, wedging them tight with small steel discs, filled the spaces with putty, and dusted them as before. Then he inserted the circular discs of glass where they belonged, dipped a brush in a small vial, and applied to the cut edges some Canada balsam—a thick, oozing, colourless liquid, possessing the same degree of refraction as does glass itself, and capable of uniting two pieces of glass together so that the point of contact is well-nigh indistinguishable.

It is impossible to describe the deftness or the skill with which the man worked—and he worked so that there were absolutely no traces of the job he left behind him.

However, he had just closed the window and fastened it when he was once more startled by a bright light which entered the room.

In an instant he realised that it had not yet lighted upon himself, and he threw himself face down upon the floor next to the wall, where he waited without a sound, scarcely breathing until

he heard the steady tramp-tramp of footsteps receding in the distance.

It was a policeman who had flashed his light upon the window; but he had seen nothing—nothing except the regulation iron bars and a window-pane with heavy drops of rain trickling and oozing down it.

The man of the long coat jumped to his feet, and said somewhat calmly:—

“That was a narrow escape—almost too narrow.” He peered uncertainly about him for a moment, and then he added: “Now for the vault!”

Once more he struck his repeater; it was exactly two o'clock. The policeman, who was not regular, had just gone. But it was time for the watchman again. He was compelled to wait for some time, for the outer door of the vault was illuminated by the rays of an electric lamp, and was visible from the small hole in the outer door of the bank.

The tramp-tramp had died away. And stepping boldly now into the full glare of this lamp, keeping his back the while toward the outer door, it revealed a tall, broad-shouldered, handsome

young man with a conventional but very becoming Vandyke beard, faultlessly attired in evening dress. He wasted no time, however, but proceeded at once to kneel down, grasping the handle of the combination lock. This, in keeping with every other thing about the bank, was also of a bygone age. It was one that worked upon the letters of the alphabet.

Slowly he turned the handle of the lock, placed his ear to the safe just outside the circle of letters, and listened to the clink, clink of the pieces of metal falling into place.

" 'H' it is then," he mused to himself as he heard the first piece fall unmistakably into its proper place. "K-I-T-T—a blame long-winded combination they've got, too," he complained.

All of a sudden he started to his feet, exclaiming:—

"What's this?"

But he kept turning on and on until presently, with a firm grasp, he turned back the knob with a sharp click; then, stepping to one side, swung open the door.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he cried. "The nerve of these people . . ."

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He smiled, shut the door again, twirled the lock to throw it off once more, and then, rapidly turning and returning it to letter after letter without the slightest hesitation or difficulty, clicked it back once again, and a second time swung the big door open. The letters to which he had turned, and which constituted the bank's combination for the safe, were the following eleven letters of the alphabet: H-K-I-T-T-S-T-J-O-H-N.

"And this," he continued with a genteel bow to the contents of the safe, "is what it is to be the best-known man-about-town."

"Well," he finally admitted to himself, "they have thought to use a depositor's or any other name than please, though the one they've selected is a deuced long one. Not a bad idea, though! By the way," he went on, pulling down a book marked "Ledger,"—"while we're about it, we'll figure up H. Kittredge's balance in this bank. I'd forgotten at last that there was one here."

It was a few hundred dollars only; he replaced the book.

"Now for business," he resumed; and proceeded to force every door and drawer in the vault.

But only in one did he find what he was after. It contained six bulky packages of bills. He laid them on the floor outside the vault, and then once more hastily inspected the interior. There was nothing else worth while.

"This is a great business for Kittredge St. John," he remarked, laughing a low, musical laugh. "A depositor, by the mere use of his own name, which he happens to know how to spell, walks into his banker's vault and robs his banker—and incidentally himself! Still," he added, "I'll not lose even the few hundred, for the bank can stand this loss, and if they don't pay me my account I'll—by George, I'll sue them! I'm just the man to . . ." He broke off abruptly with: "Good Heavens! what's that?"

However, he did not have to wait long for an answer; the next instant the steady repeated clang of a night-stick upon the pavement—the rap not of a roundsman, but of an officer calling for help—greeted his ears. That it was meant for him there was no doubt in his mind; and he fell to upbraiding himself for having been over-confident, while he hastily donned his hat and coat, picked up his tools, thrusting the packages of bills into

the deep pockets of his coat, and then noiselessly stepped through the shadow to the front of the bank.

Looking out he saw that the coast was clear—temporarily at least, for the raps had ceased.

"The front door," he muttered. "I'll try the front door and make a dash for it—it's the best chance. . . . I'll have four ways to run—I'll try that first."

He stepped to the inner door; it took him some time to get it open, and the process was somewhat noisy, although the chances were that no one outside could hear him. The bolts slid clumsily; his skeleton keys effected the rest. And now drawing back the door he fastened it open and stepped into the vestibule, where he stood for a moment, listening; but there was no sound from without; then, noiselessly, he drew back the iron bolts, unlocked the locks, suddenly but cautiously pulled back one of the ponderous sheet-iron portals, and stepped out upon the platform of the outside steps.

"The devil!" he muttered underneath his breath. For there below upon the pavement, motionless as marble, but silent and alert, stood two

policemen looking at him as he stepped out into view—two policemen, each with a cocked revolver in his hand.

For the moment, too startled to speak, he stood stock-still and held his breath; then he did what now seemed to be the only thing to do: in the full glare of the lanterns and in the face of the guns, he sauntered slowly down the steps and nodded to the two policemen.

"Officers," he said somewhat sharply, "it looks to me as though a robbery had been committed."

"It looks that way to us," one of them remarked grimly.

The man in the tall hat drew forth a cigar-case and lit a cigar—lighted it while one officer had a hand upon his shoulder, and yet so unconcerned was he that the hand that held the match never trembled for an instant.

"Yes," he went on with quiet persistence, "I believe somebody has robbed the bank, and I'll tell you why I think so. As I strolled past I saw this door open slowly on a crack. Being a director in the bank . . ." He paused and blew a cloud of smoke into the dampness of the night.

"Being a what?" demanded the officer.

"A director," went on the other, "I felt somewhat interested. I sauntered up, pushed this door open, and was about to push the inside door open, for that, although it refused to yield, I am sure is also unlocked. I fancied I heard noises in the bank, but I am not armed, and, to tell the truth, I'm something of a coward. Then I heard you, and stepped back into the glare of your lanterns. Hadn't we better make an investigation at once?" he wound up glibly.

"I should think we had," answered Burke, a plain-clothes man. For, although he had seen St. John many times and knew him as a man-about-town, yet the facts as represented to him made him suspicious. However, St. John's idea was the correct one, so together the three men pushed open the doors and entered the bank.

At a glance the officers were satisfied that there had been a robbery—that some clever cracksman had made a haul. At the end of fifteen minutes, which they spent in examining the evidence that lay before them, Burke announced:—

"I guess we all three had better go back to headquarters."

"I don't know about that," answered his

brother officer; "perhaps you'd better go and I'll wait . . ."

"A good idea," broke in St. John. "A thief may yet be lurking in the bank. Shall I wait here, or shall I go back to headquarters?"

Burke glanced with uncertainty at O'Connell, who nodded to the other.

"Of course, Mr. St. John," said O'Connell, "we have no doubt that what you say is true about your being interested in the bank, but at the same time we got to do our duty. We saw you coming out, and the bank's been robbed; I think I may as well say to you that you can consider yourself under arrest."

St. John was visibly annoyed, but, quickly recovering himself, he answered:—

"I think, officers, that you are doing the only proper thing, and I shall be very glad to place myself in your hands."

"You won't hold any hard feelings if we've made a mistake; will you, Mr. St. John?" asked O'Connell, somewhat apologetically.

St. John drew forth his cigar-case once again.

"To show you that there is no hard feeling, and that there will be none," he returned,

"allow me to induce you to smoke the pipe of peace."

The officers gasped with extraordinary pleasure: they were not accustomed to smoke fifty-cent cigars, and each, accordingly, grasped the tinfoil-covered luxury with an eager hand, each unwrapped the tinfoil and dropped it to the floor, each bit a piece off the end of his cigar, accepting Kittredge's proffer of a light, then, leaving O'Connell in the bank, the other two proceeded down the street.

"Would you mind, Mr. St. John," said Burke confidentially, "if I took a strangle hold of your right arm? Business is business, no matter how friendly it may be."

"My dear man, you can put the handcuffs on me if you want to. I want you to do your duty, and nobody is likely to see us on a night like this."

But Burke did not inflict a severer method upon his captive, and, side by side, they trailed along through the darkness. For a while they puffed in silence, Burke the while casting an occasional glance of gratefulness toward the man beside him.

"This is the bulliest smoke I ever had . . ."

he began, and then suddenly stopped, released his grip upon his captive, and Burke, the astute police officer, one of the shining lights of the force, slumped heavily down upon the sidewalk, and fell heavily asleep.

St. John smiled, retraced his steps to the private bank, and pushed open the door.

"Two of a kind," he whispered softly to himself, with considerable inward satisfaction, for there, half-sprawled across the desk in a corner of a room, lay Officer O'Connell, sleeping the sleep of the just.

It was half-past three that morning when a man wearing a long coat and an opera-hat returned to the Elberon and noiselessly ascended to his room—a suite on the second floor.

His light was burning just as he had left it. Outside it was raining still. He was wet. Removing his hat, he hung that and his coat upon a chair to drain and dry. He then took off his dress coat, lit a cigar, and sat down in an easy chair—or rather threw himself upon it.

"Jove, but I'm tired!" he exclaimed wearily. There was a slight noise, and he started and

peered into another room. Somewhere in the dark a door opened and a man's voice spoke:-

"It's you, is it?"

"Oh," replied the man in the easy-chair, "I didn't know that you would be here."

He sank back with an air of relief.

"I thought it best," returned the voice, "at least to-night. It was so wet. You have been at the club?"

"At the club," assented the man in the easy-chair, "all night and half the morning."

The man in the dark laughed in an odd sort of way.

"Good!" he responded. "Who was there?"

The man in the light half-groaned, half-sighed with weariness. He was tired.

"I'll tell you to-morrow morning all about it. I'm too tired now," he replied, rising and turning the stem of the incandescent lamp.

Then he, too, became a man in the dark; the voices were stilled; and the day began to break.

CHAPTER IX

THE ADVANTAGES OF PLAYING POKER

IT was No. 46 on the Oyer and Terminer calendar—the State, etc., *versus* H. Kittredge St. John.

The charge was breaking and entering and the robbery of sixty-odd thousand dollars from the vaults of the private bank of C. W. Mordaunt & Co.

H. Kittredge St. John, the defendant, was a society man, a club man, and generally a well-known and popular man-about-town, and his arrest was considered more or less preposterous. In fact, the newspapers had heaped no end of abuse and calumny upon the police department and its officers; everybody, including Kittredge St. John, considering the affair in the light of a huge joke.

H. Kittredge St. John was not a stranger in the place. True, he had lived there but a short time, but he had come to town loaded with the best of recommendations and letters of introduction from large Eastern cities; moreover, he had made his advent with his pockets, so to speak, full of

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money. A gentleman of leisure, single and attractive, he became a social lion, his popularity being not only with the men but likewise with the women.

At first, St. John had held himself aloof, making no attempt whatsoever to force himself into any circle, with the result that, within a short period of time, he was being sought after by the most exclusive people in the town.

He paid his bills and rarely asked for credit. When he did so, it was purely as a matter of business, and he always settled on the due date, never earlier or later.

Many a mother with marriageable daughters had courted St. John with assiduity and perseverance, for they recognised in him a *bon parti*; but without success: for St. John avoided entangling alliances of any kind—at least, he had done so thus far.

To all men he was the same courtly gentleman; and whatever of mystery had attended his advent was dispelled as time went on; and now Kittredge St. John was a much better known man than many an old-time resident of the place. It was small wonder, therefore, that the town pooh-poohed the charge upon which he was being tried.

The courtroom was overcrowded with the beauty and the chivalry, the wealth and the aristocracy of the place.

Kittredge, his counsel next to him, sat at one of the tables inside of the railing, facing the jury, but, as he did so, he kept his eyes roving back and forth among the crowd until the trial began, apparently seeking some familiar face in the audience; and, having found it, he contented himself with merely raising his eyebrows significantly. If, however, at these times, he was seeking the face of Miss Dorothy Paget, he was disappointed. She was not there, nor, in fact, were many of the more exclusive set.

Burke—a plain-clothes man—was the first witness to be called; he had just been sworn.

The prosecutor leaned against the railing in an easy, careless manner. Burke looked first at the jury and then at the prosecutor.

"Shall I tell my story, sir?" he said.

"Yes, Burke, tell your story," assented the other.

The witness turned to the jury and began:—

"It was on the 23d of last month—I was ordered downtown on special duty. It don't make

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no difference where I was—it was the night o' that Anarchist row in the hall up there. I got through at ten minutes after one. It was a bad night—buckets full of rain an' a hurricane to back it up. It was fierce! An' dark as pitch, too—half the lights were out. I had to walk from Manning's Hall up there, 'way 'cross the town, an' I had to get back to headquarters an' report."

"Well, now, Burke," interrupted the District-Attorney, "tell us just what happened, and talk a bit more slowly."

Burke nodded; he continued:—

"Well, I'd reached about Monroe an' Lafayette streets, when I heard the sound of a night-stick somewheres in the vicinity. I knew by the sound that it was a roundsman, an' I stopped to locate it. Immediately I set out on a dead run for the place. About two blocks away I run into Officer O'Connell—he wasn't rappin' then, of course, 'cause I suppose he'd heard me comin'. I knew somethin' was up, for he was long past due at that place at that time . . ."

"Is he here?" interrupted the District-Attorney.

"He is, sir," continued the witness; "there he sits, sir. Well, O'Connell, he says to me . . ."

The counsel for the defence sprang to his feet and interposed with:—

"Never mind what O'Connell said."

The witness snorted and began again.

"In consequence of a conversation I had with O'Connell at that corner . . ."

"Now, at what corner?" demanded the prisoner's counsel impatiently.

"The corner o' Washington an' Monroe," turned the witness. "If you'll give me time I'll tell you all there is to tell. At the corner o' Washington an' Monroe me an' O'Connell had a conversation, an' in consequence o' that I went with him to the next corner—Washington Avenue and First Street. That's what I did, sir."

"Well, what did you find there?" asked the District-Attorney. "Go on."

"I found on the southwest corner the Mor-daunt Bank, sir. An' O'Connell told me . . ."

The prisoner's counsel again jumped to his feet.

"What did you do, Burke?" inquired the District-Attorney. "Tell us what you did."

"Well, replied Burke uncertainly, "I didn't

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do nothin' just then. I went up on the stoop and looked through the little hole in the outside doors, an' I did not see but that everything looked all right, an' I told O'Connell—that is to say, sir," he corrected hastily, "I stayed there with O'Connell for a time—about ten minutes, I should say. An' here's where the queer thing happened, gentlemen. Me an' O'Connell," he went on, warming up now that he had reached the interesting stage, "was just startin' in to reconnoitre when we heard a big racket at the front door—it's on the corner, cater-cornered like. It was the vestibule inside door he tackled first, o' course, 'n' we heard some bolts shoot back; 'n' then, all of a sudden, something snaps very quick an' loud, an' the big iron doors opens out and a fellow comes down the front steps. He didn't come down right away, either, for he saw us there. We feazed him a bit, I guess!

"As I said, it was dark an' rainin' pitch-forks, but we could see this fellow come down all right, me an' O'Connell, an' we both snapped our lanterns on him at the same time; so we had him in a light that was double strength. The fellow had on a high hat—one o' them dull-lookin' things, not

a regular stove-pipe—an' full dress—we could see just a bit o' his shirt—an' a long overcoat. Them's the first things we noticed; an', if he hadn't turned around when the light flashed on him, we'd a nabbed him then an' there; but he did turn around an' looked at us—an' you could a knocked us both down with a feather, me an' O'Connell, for we knew the man well, both of us did.

"Well, to make a long story short, while we were both standin' there, pretty near paralysed an' both of us with guns, the fellow turned an' made for it, an' us after him, me an' O'Connell. We'd a caught him all right but for its bein' such a night—but it was so dark and windy we couldn't track him by sight or by sound, so finally we lost him an' gave it up for good.

"We came back to the bank, an' I stayed there while O'Connell went for young Mr. Mordaunt, an' he dressed himself an' come, an' we found that everything had been smashed open an' sixty thousand odd dollars an' cents was gone clean."

"Did you find anything else?" questioned the prosecutor.

"Not that night," responded Burke; "but the next day we found that one o' the side windows

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had been entered: the bars were sawed clean apart an' stuck together again with some kind o' stuff; an' the window-pane had been cut an' forced, an' the piece that he'd cut out he'd pasted on again. That's the reason we didn't find it that night. It was done too clever."

"And did you recognise the man?" inquired the District-Attorney.

"I did, sir," answered the witness; "an' so did O'Connell. We both knew him . . ."

The District-Attorney visibly trembled with excitement. He asked:—

"Who was it, Burke?"

Burke bent his gaze upon the man at the next table, pointing with his finger as he spoke:—

"It was Kittredge St. John, the man that sits at that table, sir."

There was an audible murmur in the court-room, which had been as still as death.

"The prisoner?" continued the prosecutor.

"The prisoner, yes, sir," assented Burke. "I knew him well by sight, sir," he added. "It's the same man—I can swear to that."

"Cross-examine," said the State's Attorney briefly.

The counsel for the defence rose with a smile upon his face.

"Mr. Burke," he began in a suave voice, "you have seen Mr. St. John since that night; have you not?"

"Yes, sir," replied Burke.

"You know where he lives?"

"I didn't then," replied Burke; "we can't keep track o' everybody from headquarters, but I do now. He lives at the Elberon."

"And you attended there next day, did you not, for the purpose of apprehending him?"

"I did, sir."

"And at that time is it not a fact that you made a careful search of his apartments in the Elberon for the purpose of finding something to connect him with the crime?"

"It is, sir."

"And did you find anything calculated to arouse suspicion?" went on the prisoner's counsel.

"I did not, sir," replied Burke.

"That's all," announced the counsel for the defence.

"Wait a minute!" exclaimed the judge as the witness started to leave the witness-stand.

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"Burke, are you sure of what you say? Isn't it possible that you may have been mistaken? This is a serious matter, officer—you must be very careful. You're sure this is the man?"

"Your Honour," returned Burke doggedly, "my record shows that I'm a careful man—your Honour knows I am. An' I say in this thing I can't be mistaken. I was never surer of a thing in all my life, an' I swear that the man who sits there, Kittredge St. John, is the man that robbed the bank that night, so help me God!"

"One moment," put in the prisoner's counsel; "what day of the week was that, did you say?"

"I didn't say, sir, but it was two o'clock on Wednesday morning, the 23d o' last month. Roundsman O'Connell," continued the witness, turning to the judge, "will tell you just the same as I have, your Honour."

Burke stepped down.

O'Connell took the witness-stand and gave his testimony and left it. Burke stood corroborated in each detail. There was no cross-examination of this witness.

"The prosecution rests," announced the counsel for the state.

The prisoner's attorney now rose. A flickering ghost of a smile played around the corner of his mouth. He departed from the usual rule, making no opening statement to the jury.

"I'll call the sheriff of the county," he announced.

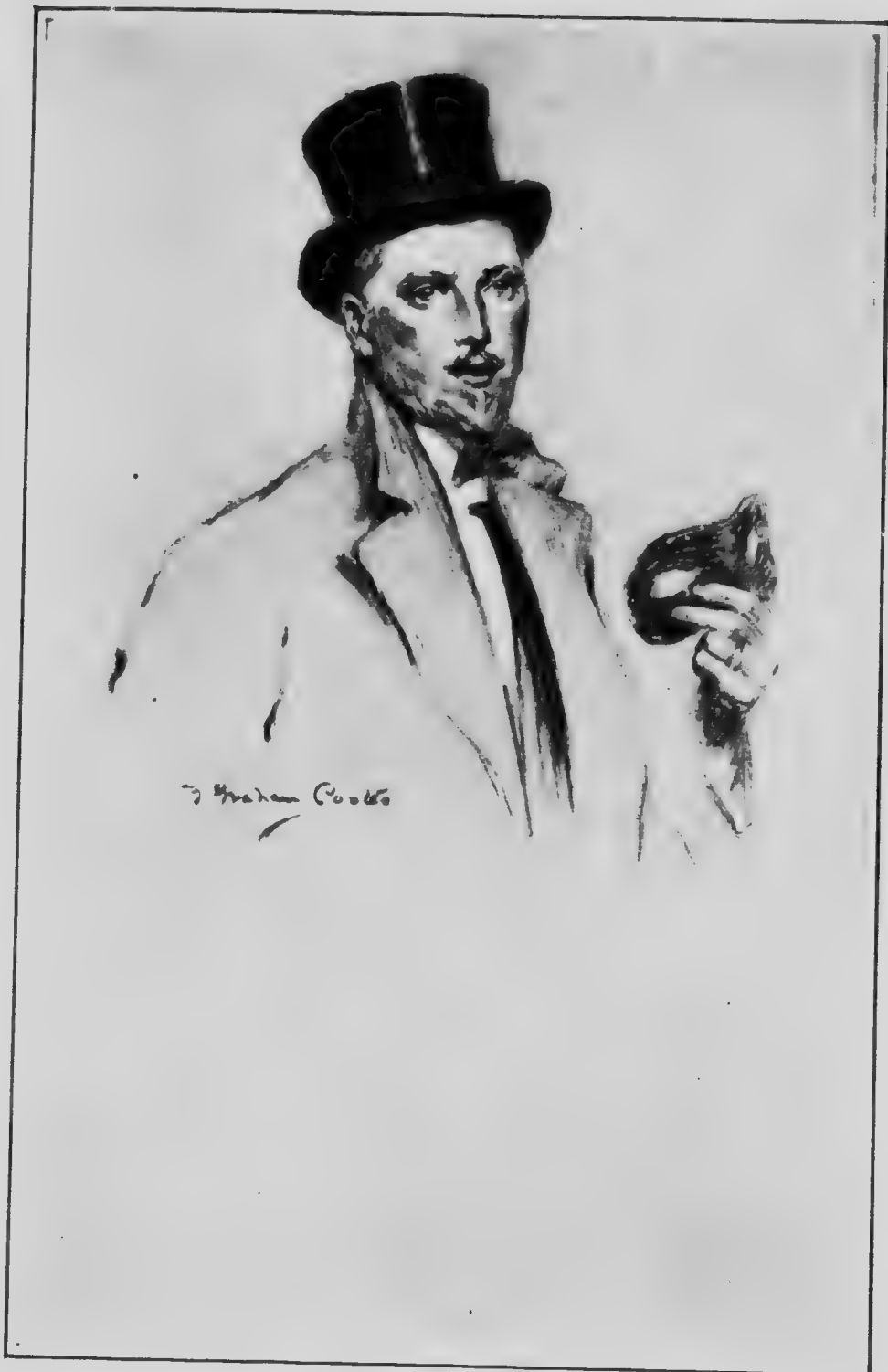
The sheriff—a stout, good-natured-looking man, with a broad, genial, honest face—had been seated quietly in the body of the courtroom outside the railing, an unnoticed spectator. He rose, and, with some difficulty, made his way through the crowd, nodding as he went to the judge, the counsel, and some of the jurymen. He did not look at St. John, nor did St. John look at him.

He took the stand and was sworn, and then, settling himself comfortably in the chair, threw one leg over the other, and waited for the question.

"Sheriff," began the counsel for the defence carelessly, "would you mind stating to the jury just where you were at two o'clock Wednesday morning on the 23d ultimo?"

The Sheriff looked around and smiled.

"On Monday night, on Tuesday night, and on Wednesday night, the 21st, 22d, and 23d of last month," he replied deliberately and with an evi-



Kittredge St. John

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dent relish of the situation, "I was in the card-room of the Iroquois Club on each night from ten o'clock in the evening until after three o'clock the next morning."

"When you say Wednesday night, do you mean night or morning?"

"I'll explain that," said the sheriff. "When I say Monday night, I mean that I began Monday night at ten and ended Tuesday morning at three; on Tuesday night I began at ten and ended Wednesday morning at three, and so on. I was there three nights and mornings, beginning with Monday night."

"Will you state just what you were doing?"

"Certainly," responded the witness. "We were playing poker—disposing of some old scores that we had waited for several weeks to pay off."

"Was anybody with you? If so, state to the jury just who it was."

"Yes," returned the sheriff, leaning forward in his turn, as all witnesses have a way of doing; "there were three people with me, making four altogether; three of us played each night, and the fourth man looked on and kept us company."

"And these four . . ."

"These four," continued the sheriff, "were myself and John R. Montgomery and H. Kittredge St. John, the prisoner at the bar."

"John R. Montgomery is here?"

"He's here," assented the witness.

"And the fourth man—who was he?" inquired the attorney.

The sheriff was plainly embarrassed, but he nerved himself, nevertheless, for the ordeal.

"The fourth man," he began, looking nervously around, "the fourth man was the—the judge presiding at this trial."

There was a prolonged titter in the courtroom at the judge's expense. The judge rapped for order, but, at the same time, nodded in a dignified way in confirmation of the testimony.

"Was the prisoner there on each occasion?" resumed the counsel.

"He was."

"Every night?"

"Every night," replied the sheriff. "He was the first man on hand, and the last man to leave. He was with us all the time."

"How far is the Iroquois Club from the Mordaunt Bank?"

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"A good three miles, I should say," replied the sheriff."

"Take the witness," concluded the counsel for the defence, settling back in his seat, satisfaction written all over his face.

The District-Attorney rose with a frown. There was a loud buzz of conversation in the courtroom, which his Honour stopped with a few raps of his gavel upon the desk. The District-Attorney was plainly nonplussed, and he showed it.

"Sheriff," inquired he, looking that individual squarely in the eye, "how do you fix the night of the 22d or the morning of the 23d? By the way, which was it?"

"Both," replied the sheriff laconically.

"Well, how do you fix it, then? Why do you remember it?"

The sheriff returned the District-Attorney's stare with interest.

"I'll tell you how I fix it," said the sheriff, shaking his finger at the examiner. "I could fix it anyway by other things, but I know by one thing in particular. When I got there that night there were two men ahead of me: one of 'em was St.

John; the other Montgomery. It was a few minutes after ten when we started in, because they said I was late, and I said I wasn't; but it was afterward proven that my watch was about ten minutes slow.

"Now we started in to play, understand; and when you're playing poker at the Iroquois time flies like the dickens. We've got a ticker-tape up there in the card-room, and it runs all night as well as all day. The telegraph people here run it. Well, the news of this very robbery came over the ticker while we were sitting there—Kittredge and the rest of us—about half-past two in the morning. Kittredge sat next to me, and I said to him when the news came over the wire: 'Kittredge,' said I, 'Mordaunt's safe has been cracked and there's a pile of money gone.' And, then and there, I called up headquarters and we found out all about it. That's how it was—and that's how I know. And his Honour can tell you just what I tell you, too.

"What is more," concluded the sheriff officially and for the benefit of the reporters who were taking down his testimony, "I want to tell you, counsellor, that the county detectives would never have

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made a bull like this either, and don't you forget it—never in God's world."

The sheriff stepped down, and John R. Montgomery stepped up. His testimony was identical in substance with that of the sheriff. It was the purpose of the prisoner's counsel to call the prisoner, but, just as he was about to do so, the prisoner plucked him by the sleeve.

After a short conference, the attorney for the defence announced that the defence closed its case.

The judge's charge was short and formal in the extreme. At the close of it the jury, although invited to retire, declined to do so, and, without stepping from the jury-box, returned a verdict of "Not Guilty."

The crowd lined up close to St. John, showering upon him congratulations, even insisting upon shaking him by the hand; but all the while St. John's eye was fixed wistfully upon the exit; for some reason he was anxious to get away. Thanking his counsel briefly, together with his witnesses, he then hurriedly made his way through the courtroom and finally reached the open air. But there still clung to him a little bevy of men and women—friends and acquaintances, who had been in the

courtroom. Suddenly his gaze wandered down the street.

"There—there is somebody I want to see!" he exclaimed; but it was merely an excuse to get away. Presently he met Officer O'Connell and Burke the plain-clothes man, upon whom he smiled in a way that was almost childlike and bland. They returned his salutation with curt nods of the head.

"Well, Jim," said O'Connell to Burke, as St. John left them far in the rear, "what d'ye make of it, anyway?"

"Billy," returned Burke solemnly, "I don't know what to make of it. The only solution I've arrived at is that the devil must have been stringin' us that night."

O'Connell shook his head. "Well, no more of them Iroquois Club cigars for me," he said.

CHAPTER X

SHADOWED

ALL the way down the street St. John continued to meet his over-enthusiastic friends; but, by means of one pretext and another, he succeeded in eluding them. Finally, arriving at the Elberon, his bachelor-apartment home, he stood glancing hastily up and down the street to make sure that no one saw him, then quickly unlocking the door he stepped inside, and noiselessly ascended to the second-floor apartment.

"Nobody here," he remarked with a sigh of relief, as he passed hastily through room after room; and immediately seating himself at a desk, began to write, as follows:

MY DEAR MISS PAGET:—

It seems better to address you so for the present. There are certain things to which I prefer to refer by letter alone.

You will recall that I wrote you on the 24th of last month, requesting you to make no reference, in my presence or to me, to anything which might have happened. That request was not prompted by any desire to be spared humiliation—it was a part of the peculiar circumstances which have constituted a part of my present life.

Now that I have been vindicated in your eyes and in the eyes of the world, I ask you to make to me no reference to to-day's happenings, nor to such vindication, nor, indeed, to this letter or the other.

I have many good reasons for making this request, which will appear later. I close with the expression of much regard.

Sincerely,

H. KITTREDGE ST. JOHN.

"A bit formal, perhaps," continued St. John, "but certainly imperative. This complication with Miss Paget was certainly unlooked for, and yet"—he smiled to himself—"not altogether unfortunate for me. I don't know, after all, but what it is a good thing—a very good thing."

He enclosed the missive in an envelope, addressed the latter, and sealed it carefully with wax, upon which he impressed the seal ring which he wore.

"There's plenty of time," he said, looking at his watch; "I'll send this up by messenger."

Rising from his desk, he drew upon his head a soft, felt hat, which partly covered his face, and stole downstairs again.

The street was deserted almost, but not quite, for at each end of the block lounged one man,

intent, apparently, upon the Elberon, but in reality intent on Kittredge St. John.

"Great Scott!" muttered St. John to himself.
"So soon again?"

He retraced his steps and re-entered the hall; and, passing through to the rear of the apartment-house, made his exit through an alleyway. Once clear of the place, he hastened toward the centre of the town and handed his message in at a local delivery office with instruction to send it out at once.

Meanwhile, one of the two men who had stood outside sauntered up and accosted the other.

"Did you see him, Jim, when he stuck his head outside?"

"He won't come out now till dark," was the answer. "You see if he does."

"Well," returned the first man, "he saw us all right, though he can't be sure just who we are since we're toggged out in this way. We might just as well stick together now for a while, anyway."

Whereupon the other handed him a cigar, which they both proceeded to light, gradually falling into deep conversation.

"Gee!" suddenly exclaimed Burke, grasping his companion by the arm. "He's given us the slip after all."

"Went out the back way, I suppose, an' now he's coming back as bold as brass," remarked the other.

A moment more and the object of their remarks disappeared within the house. He looked neither to the right nor to the left. Most certainly he did not see the plain-clothes men, or, if he did, he gave no sign.

It was now fairly late in the afternoon. Burke ordered his assistant to go around the corner and 'phone headquarters to send another man, ending with:—

"We got this fellow now where we want him, an' it's a blame good thing he forgot somethin' and had to come back. We'll camp on his trail; we'll follow him no matter where he goes. Stumpy, let me tell you," he went on. "I told it in court, an' I say that there man is the man who robbed that bank, an', by George, I'm goin' to keep him in sight if it takes the whole force to do it!"

The other man came up from headquarters.

"Say, Burke," he explained, "I saw your man downtown. What're you doin' up here?"

"I know you did," replied Burke, "an' he came back, an' he's in the Elberon over there, an' don't you forgit it."

The other glanced at him doubtfully.

"Oh, that's it, is it!" he returned. "I know I saw him and wondered at the time where you were."

Burke and the two men vanished into thin air. Once more the street became deserted. Dusk had come on; it was growing darker every moment. At a quarter to eight, however, a man, clad in evening clothes and a light overcoat emerged from the apartment-house and sauntered down the street. In front of a house with an English basement stood an electric street-lamp. He passed this, and the light shone full on his face. Reaching the corner, he glanced up and down and behind him for an instant, and then, breaking into a fast walk, made for the west end of the town.

He had no sooner done so than a man emerged from the basement, another from an alleyway across the street, and a third from a recess around the corner.

Without the slightest recognition of each other, they turned in and followed the man in the light overcoat, each man in his own way.

Down at headquarters, a few hours earlier that afternoon, the sergeant called to a special officer; the officer hurried in.

"Say, Flynn," he remarked, with a jerk of the head toward the window, "look at that man. There's the man the banks want us to keep tab on. See him? That fellow with the slouch hat—that's the chap. Burke is after him, but there is no sign of Burke around. He's slipped a cog somehow. S'pose you turn in and follow the fellow. The banks are standing behind us, and they're paying good money to keep track of this man. It ain't our business to lose him. S'pose you reckon him up a bit."

The officer nodded and started off. He kept his man in sight. It was difficult work, not only because his man was a rapid walker and swerved in and out of devious thoroughfares with rapidity, but also because he kept constantly looking around and behind him.

St. John knew that he was being followed, and, though he was the shadowed, he also was the

shadower. The afternoon passed and evening came, but still on and on he walked, keeping his eye the while on his pursuer quite as faithfully as did the officer keep track of him.

Suddenly St. John turned swiftly down a dark, narrow street, and when his pursuer reached the corner, St. John had disappeared.

After a fruitless search of some ten minutes, the special suddenly felt some one touch him on the back of his hand; in an instant he recognised the touch, and followed the other to a dark recess.

"Well, Burke," he remarked, "what're you doin' here? I been followin' your man all the evenin', an', by George, I just lost him!"

"What man?" demanded Burke.

"St. John, of course," returned the other.

"So, they've put you on the job, too? Well, with the crowd we've got, there ain't much that he can do without our seein' him. Only we've got considerable of a wait before us before he comes out."

"Comes out where?"

"Why, he's making a visit in that brownstone front down there—No. 219, the one with the grounds at the side. Thought you knew that."

"Knew it! Why, I just had him in tow ten minutes ago an' lost him. So that's where he is, is it?"

"Sure," replied Burke. "He's been there an hour already. It's about time he left, I'm thinkin'."

The other man started.

"What you givin' us? I saw him on this here street not fifteen minutes ago. Or else," he went on with a smile, "or else you lost him, too. Come on—own up. Aren't you givin' me a bit of a stiff?"

"Stiff, nothin'!" retorted Burke. "I tell you he's in there all right, all right. I got a couple o' men there watchin' the place. When he comes out they'll give me a flash of light. He's in there all right."

"Look here, Burke," went on the other, "I tell you he ain't. I tell you I saw him go around the corner. I know what I'm talkin' about."

Burke looked at the special long and earnestly. Finally he had to admit that it was possible that the man had again given them the slip.

An hour later, Kittredge St. John took his de-

parture from the Paget home. Descending lightly the steps to the street, he looked carelessly about him before starting leisurely toward the centre of the town. As he did so, four men emerged from their hiding-places and followed him; but this time they never left his heels until he had disappeared once more into the front door of the Elberon apartments.

And, when he had done so, Burke and one other man sat down and camped upon his trail.

That night the safe in the wholesale hardware concern of Canda & Willett was cracked, and something over \$17,000 was stolen.

CHAPTER XI

INSIDE INFORMATION

MR. BONWIT glanced anxiously toward his fiancée, her perturbation, even to his dull eye, being all too evident.

"You look worried, Roxane," he ventured in tones sounding the heights and depths of his affection; "what's the matter, dear?"

And, indeed, well might he have asked the question. For as he continually pressed in his big hand her slender fingers and smoothed her bare, round, white fore-arm, much as one might stroke a cat, the fascinating Mrs. Bellairs' face wore anything but a happy look. Her glance strayed on, past the amorous president of the Manufacturers' National, across the intervening landscape to the outlines of the Iroquois Club down in the centre of the town, which was barely visible from the harbour of "The Ivies"—Mrs. Bellairs' villa—where they were sitting, and the next instant rested upon the chimneys that topped a certain bachelor apartment-house not far from the club; and, as her rest-

less gaze darted from one to the other, her lips tightened over her white teeth, the pupils of her eyes shrunk suddenly to pin points, and her fingers clutched Bonwit's with a convulsive grasp.

At first Bonwit mistook this sudden pressure for a demonstration of affection, but, on looking once more at her face, he became startled and repeated, in alarm:—

“What—what's the matter, Roxane?”

Roxane shook her head, but did not answer. She could not tell him what troubled her—reveal to him that the devil of doubt again had assailed her, the little devil that hovered over her night and day whenever she thought of Kittredge St. John. She was very still for an instant, and then quite suddenly she threw back her head and smiled gratefully at the man beside her.

“It's good of you to ask, *bon ami*,” she replied.

“I beg your pardon, but I didn't quite catch that,” said the banker, placing his hand behind his ear from force of habit.

“I said,” returned Roxane, “that it was good of you to ask . . .”

“But you said more than that,” persisted Mr. Bonwit.

Roxane searched her memory. After a moment, she answered as she looked at him with a half-smile on her face:—

“Surely that’s what I said.”

Again Bonwit shook his head.

“But you said something else,” he insisted.

“Oh, then it was *bon ami*—was that it?” she asked, laughing outright.

“Ah—I see—a pet name—I love pet names, Roxane. You’ll call me that always, won’t you?”

Roxane came as near to a snicker as was possible for her to come.

“Do you think it quite suits you?” she demanded.

“Suit me or not,” he persisted, assuming that the unknown appellation held a world of warmth, “I like it. Say it again, dear, won’t you?”

Roxane, apparently to hide her blushes, but in reality to conceal the mirth that convulsed her, turned away her head and whispered:—

“*Bon ami.*”

Mr. Bonwit was almost beside himself with sheer happiness. A few seconds later, however, he observed:—

“If any one but yourself said it, perhaps . . .”

Roxane suppressed giggles.

"Of course," she assured him. "But when *I* say it to *you*, dear, it's most proper—it's a case of *honi soit qui mal y pense*—is it not so, *bon ami*?"

"And would it be proper, Roxane, for me to call you by that name?" asked Bonwit earnestly.

Once more Roxane turned away her head, and, with the invisible hand of self-control she clutched her saving sense of humour.

"Decidedly so," she quickly informed him.

"Then, I'll call you by that name to-morrow," he faltered after several ineffectual efforts. "Indeed, after this we'll always call each other by that name, if you don't mind."

"When we are quite alone," acquiesced Roxane with a sigh.

"Oh, of course," said Mr. Bonwit with an emphasis that implied that even though the world, in its prudishness, might condemn them, yet he and she would always understand.

"But, Roxane," he proceeded anxiously, "you haven't told me what it is that worries you, my dear."

Roxane shrugged her shoulders prettily.

"Why should I worry you about it?"

"Oh, but I insist upon knowing . . ."

She poured him tea, saying:—

"Let us eat, drink, and be merry while . . ."

She broke off suddenly and handed him the cup; but he waved it aside, and asked:—

"Has it anything to do with me?"

She threw a glance of meaning across the tops of villas and down into the heart of the town.

"No, indeed, it has nothing whatever to do with you, my dear," she told him, with another shrug of her shoulders. "It's sordid—merely business—little business worries."

"Business!" he ejaculated. "Then, of course, I can help you, if you'll tell me."

Roxane smiled.

"After all, perhaps you can. . . . It's about my trustee that I worry. I believe him honest, and yet . . ." She drew forth from the folds of her dress a neat statement of account and handed it to Mr. Bonwit.

A glance at the figures fairly took Mr. Bonwit's breath away. He was about to make some remark when she suddenly went on with:—

"It is old Gaspard, and he fails to account for the income of a fifty-thousand-dollar mortgage—

the income for two whole years, you see. It's the Croissant mortgage."

Bonwit's business eyes continued to scan the paper.

"But," he protested, "he fails to account for the principal, also; there is no Croissant mortgage here."

Roxane's eye brightened.

"That is all right—*bon ami*. You see, that Croissant mortgage is sold; I had it sold some two or three months ago. I needed the money—but what has that to do with the income? For years I have been getting Croissant income—where is it now?"

"Why," laughed Bonwit, chuckling inwardly, "you say you sold your mortgage and used the money—used the principal."

"Just what Gaspard says," she replied in bewilderment. "But what has it to do with income? Always I should get the same income, should I not?"

Roxane's eyes glanced into his with the serenity of a child—her perfect faith was his by right.

"But," he explained, "if you use a part of your

principal, you can't get income any more on what you use; don't you see?"

"Say that again," she asked, her eyes trustfully looking into his.

"If you use up your principal, of course your income on it is gone," he repeated with a smile.

Roxane was puzzled.

"Just what old Gaspard says, and he does not do me the justice to explain it. All he utters in answer to my fifteen or twenty polite letters on the subject, is this one epigram: 'All women are fools.' But you, *bon ami*, you will explain fully to me; will you not? My head—ah, it is no head for business, I am afraid!"

Whereupon Mr. Bonwit, for the next half-hour, proceeded to explain to a woman, who knew more in one minute about business than most women would know in a lifetime, just how and why it was that when you spent your principal your income ceased at once.

"At last I understand!" exclaimed Roxane gleefully.

Bonwit surrendered to her the statement of account, his eyes glistening as he gloated over the millions that it dealt with. But how was he to

know that all this by-play was purposeful; that it constituted the thin edge of the wedge; that it was the prelude to a catastrophe that was destined to occur within the next few days?—all of which Roxane knew and pursued her course accordingly.

“Will you always explain these things to me?” she queried.

“Of course,” replied Bonwit; “but are you quite sure that is all that worried you?”

The woman smiled and showed her white teeth.

“It is not right to worry you—worry you about affairs—a woman should never do that—never worry a man with her troubles. Her mission is to entertain, to amuse, to comfort, to . . .” She stopped suddenly, a faint little smile hovering on her face.

“Go on,” said Bonwit, his great love showing in his eyes.

“Those are not altogether my thoughts,” she hastened to say. “No, for I think the best part of love, yes, of matrimony, is to hear and help bear each other’s worries. Does one confide in parents, brothers, sisters? Isn’t it usually some one whom we have chosen—well, just as you have

chosen me and I have chosen you? Perhaps," she faltered, "you do not agree with me."

"Of course I do," blurted out Bonwit, going unheeding to his doom.

"Ah, but you do not tell me your worries, dear," she went on swiftly; "all that you tell me is love, love, love. Is it because I am not worthy to hear the rest—too little head and brain to be confided in?"

"Surely," spluttered Bonwit, delighted, "you don't want me to bother you with . . ."

She held up her forefinger.

"Of course, you must have business worries like every one else. Ah, I have seen the little wrinkles on your brow, and I have tried to smooth them out as no woman ever tried! I have said to myself, time and again, 'Of course I can be of no help, I cannot understand, but I can sympathise.' But you never came to me, and I have often wondered if you did not go to some other woman for sympathy."

Bonwit's countenance became rubicund with joy.

"Great Scott, Roxane!" he cried. "You couldn't have said anything that pleased me more! I've just been aching to tell you all about it."

"About what?" she asked, startled.

For a moment Bonwit was silent. Upon him were the habits formed by years of business experience. He never talked bank to any one outside of the bank—a banking business is a secret business. And yet, the confidence, the faith, the witchery of this woman intoxicated him as if with wine. At length he ventured:—

"I'll tell you, Roxane, you're dead right. I have been worried—worried like the devil, too. It's the bank that's worried me."

Roxane looked alarmed.

"It will not break?"

"No, no," he laughingly reassured her; "it isn't that. It's the board of directors that's got me—me, Philander Bonwit, the biggest banking man in town—by the throat!"

Roxane looked at his throat sympathetically.

"Tell me. . . ."

"They're too progressive," he went on; "they want to run a bank like a department store—want to take in every little twopenny account that comes along—and they want to take big risks when it comes to loaning money. I'm conservative, they say, too conservative. But they're

too progressive, I tell them—and so they are."

Roxane clenched her right hand.

"You should take them all by the throat and throw them out into the street," she said with a show of anger.

Bonwit shook his head.

"They're elected by the stockholders. They're the directors. They have the say."

"Some day," she ventured, clutching somewhere within the folds of her dress Gaspard's statement of account, "some day maybe I could buy some stock in this bank of yours; maybe then I could help you to get them by the throat."

Bonwit's heart leaped.

"I hadn't thought of that," he said; but his tell-tale blush was not lost on Roxane. She knew, and was glad to know, that he had thought of this many times. For Bonwit may have been one part heart, but he was at least three parts greed, and, much as the fascinating Mrs. Bellairs enthralled him, her purse was not without its fascination, too.

"But that isn't all," declared Roxane tactfully. "There is something special—some crisis has wor-

ried you more than ever the last few days. Why, you've actually been getting thin—and it's all wrong for one of your physique to get thin."

"Do you think so?" asked Bonwit, who had spent a considerable portion of his time in reducing his weight—a reduction never at any time perceptible.

"I know so," she answered promptly. "Yet you please me just as you are, *bon ami*."

Whereupon Mr. Bonwit digressed. He insisted at this juncture that he was entitled to a dozen kisses; finally reduced the number to half a dozen, and in the end pleaded for one, which, however, was not forthcoming.

"Not until you have told me all your troubles," responded the elusive Mrs. Bellairs; "for only then will you stop getting thin, and only then shall I love you. Now then. . . ."

"The recent trouble," obeyed Bonwit, "is due to the decision of the board of directors—contrary to my vote—in taking on a certain Western bank of somewhat shaky standing. This bank's offer was too alluring, and my bank jumped at the bait. They're satisfied that this new customer is sound—and, of course, if it is so, we'll make a lot of money

on it. But other banks have passed it up—other Eastern banks, and my view is that what isn't good enough for the other chaps isn't good enough for me."

"You never take chances, then?" observed the widow.

"No," admitted Bonwit.

There was infinite allurements in the lifting of Roxane's eyebrows.

"And yet," she protested, "what a chance you take in me. But go on—I'm all attention, all sympathy; tell me everything, dear."

"The whole thing culminated in a decisive step the board took. This new Western customer wanted a hundred thousand cash—wanted it right away—on securities that don't look good to me. The board thinks they are gilt-edged and are going to send the currency right out."

"Currency?" demanded Mrs. Bellairs interestedly. "You mean coin, gold, silver . . ."

"Oh, no!" responded Bonwit carelessly; "bills, that's all."

"And they would risk—how much did you say?"

"A hundred thousand," repeated Bonwit.

"And," she went on, her eagerness disguised as sympathy, "they sent all this money out on bad security."

"Humph!" grunted Bonwit, his hand clenching at the recollection, "they would have sent it yesterday—it's in our vaults, ready to go out—if I hadn't raised thunder with them at the meeting. Talk about getting thin! Why, I lost five pounds trying to persuade those chaps . . ."

"You won, then," interrupted Roxane with a smile.

"No," he quickly informed her; "there's a truce. They're going to hold another meeting on it in a day or two, but it's only a polite concession to me—old Bonwit, as they call me. I can see they'll have their way; their policy is going to win out—but it spells ruin for the bank in time. Fools that they are!"

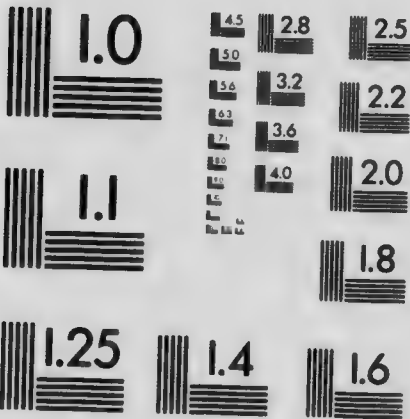
Roxane suddenly rose.

"Ah, you should have told me this long before! For, let me tell you something. To-day, it is true, it may be impossible to ward off this crisis; but the time will come—the time will come when you'll not only be the president—as you now are,—but you shall be the board of directors—the



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stockholders—the bank itself, and your word will be law. You . . .”

She paused; Bonwit, too, had risen. His thoughts were on the Gaspard account, and his eyes glowed with business ambition.

“When that time comes . . .”

Roxane stretched wide her arms.

“Would that I had known all this before,” she repeated, and quite honestly. “You should have told me everything. But, look!” she cried, staring at his glowing face; “even in the telling you have grown stronger, younger. That is the secret of the confidence of love. In the telling, troubles vanish; do they not? Keep your eyes on the future, keep your eyes on me, my friend.”

“I can’t keep my eyes off you,” sighed Bonwit.

“Ah,” cried Roxane, “to be of some use to you! If I were able to stand here now and say to you—to the dastardly board of your bank—No, that shipment does not go West! However, it is good to think that the time will come when I shall be of some help. . . .”

After he had gone, Roxane ascended to her cupola, and stood for a long time in the dusk glance-

ing down upon the early evening lights of the town.

"Little he knows," she whispered to herself with a smile, "how soon the purpose of the board will come to naught—how soon his policies will be enforced."

CHAPTER XII

THE KEYBOARD CIPHER

ROXANE BELLAIRS entered the Manufacturers' National Bank and stood tapping upon the plate-glass window of the president's door. It was after business hours, and, save for a clerk or two at work in remote corners of the bank, Mr. Bonwit was alone.

"I've come, you see, according to my promise," announced the widow. "And here," as the footman entered with a huge black case, "we have the implement of torture."

"Oh!" gasped the president as he glanced upon the footman's burden, "I thought you were going to do this at your place."

The widow shook her head.

"I have no light, my friend, save on my lawn; and surely you wouldn't want me to take a picture of you there. You have such wide west windows," she announced, as her glance roved into the bank. "And at this time of day the sun is just where he

should be. Come, and I will show you a trick or two worth while."

"Are you going to take my picture in this room?" asked Bonwit.

Roxane gazed critically at the lights and shades. After a moment, she answered:—

"No, not in this room, but somewhere in the bank. Suppose we make a tour—just a little tour of inspection."

"Delighted," he said, leading the way; but suddenly he stopped, his face flushed, and added: "Just a moment, Roxane, until—until I send these young chaps home."

When the president of the Manufacturers' returned he found Roxane alone, having dismissed her footman.

"Not much of a cosey corner, this old bank, Roxane," resumed Mr. Bonwit, holding out his arms in a very earnest but somewhat lumbering manner; "but still . . ."

"Oh, but we are not here for cosey corners," she interrupted, shaking her slender, white, jewelled finger at him. "We have business afoot. Come, come with me." And she led him into the bank and to the three broad barred windows, be-

yond which the sun, still white, hung low in the heavens.

"Now, then," she went on, "we must take you as I am to paint you—a typical banking man, with all the lights and shades strong upon the face; must we not?"

"I thought I was going to sit for this portrait," grumbled Bonwit.

"You child!" she exclaimed. "You shall sit and look into my eyes for many days while I shall work like mad. Of course, for the final touches you shall sit. You know the modern method is to outline everything. First, comes the photograph; then the life-size, life-like enlargement; then you, the life model; and finally the finished portrait. Now, dear, suppose you stand here for a moment."

Mr. Bonwit stood, where she placed him, in the full glare of the sunlight. Swiftly, then, she placed the huge camera upon its tripod, and quite as swiftly viewed him through the lens.

"It will not do," she said; "we shall have to try elsewhere."

They tried another place, and still another, and

finally Roxane's eyes lighted with the joy and triumph of the artist as she exultantly exclaimed:—

"At last we have it! I shall place you precisely where you belong—directly beside this huge vault door."

And, indeed, no sooner had the words left her lips than her subject was standing where the lights and shades so adjusted themselves as to set forth his portly figure to the best advantage; and, in the twinkling of an eye, the widow had taken no less than six pictures of him in various positions beside the big vault door.

"Wouldn't be a bad plan to have that vault door in the painting, would it?" he asked.

"Rather typical of a bank man, seems to me."

"Indeed, no—there shall be no vault door in this picture. It is the man that I shall paint."

A few evenings later she exhibited to Mr. Bonwit the finished photograph. "And now," she added, "if you will ascend with me to my studio in the cupola of 'The Ivies,' you shall see where you and I shall spend many pleasant days together."

They ascended the winding staircase that led

to the cupola, madame very lightly, and Mr. Bonwit very heavily.

"Jerusalem!" he cried out as he looked upon the expanse of canvas extending almost from the ceiling to the floor; "you're going to paint me big enough, Roxane; aren't you?"

"I have a big man to paint," she explained, making him a courtesy. "And here," she continued, turning to the life-size photograph, "is an enlargement from which I sketch in the rough detail. And every day, or as often as you like to come, you may come and see for yourself how I am getting on. Day by day, I shall bring the real Bonwit, almost a living man, out of this canvas, out of these paint brushes. You shall see—ah, I am an artist! And, like all artists, I have one great, overwhelming, mastering inspiration, as you shall see. That is you, dear."

Day after day, after banking hours, Mr. Bonwit wended his way to "The Ivies" on the top of the hill, climbing his way into the cupola, where he gazed with undisguised pleasure upon the fast-growing Bonwit, who appeared upon the canvas. On one of these occasions, he grumblingly told her:—

"Roxane, I don't see why you don't let me announce our engagement—why you won't set the day?"

"Why, it's just glorious—this being betrothed and nobody knowing it. In this concealment there is just the spice of romance that the artist enjoys. Besides, could I paint, do you think, the portrait of my husband? It's the apparent freedom and yet the bondage that I enjoy. The picture must be finished first. When you marry me, you may destroy the artist."

"Just as you say, Roxane. But how long before it will be finished?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Not even an artist could answer that. You must be patient. Let us dream; reality is close enough at hand."

It was that same evening, after Mr. Bonwit had taken his departure, that Roxane Bellairs stole back once more into the cupola, swept on her brilliant lights over her canvas, and drew down the shades, where she sat for a long time with folded hands, waiting.

At last she heard the sound she waited for: a gentle tap-tap upon the window. In an instant

she extinguished the lights, raised the shades, and looked out. Upon the sloping roof, with his face not three feet from hers, stood a man. She threw back the window, and the man leaped in; and then once more she swept on her lights.

"I came up the outside way," remarked St. John, as he stood half-blinking in the full glare. "I suppose that was all right to-night?"

"Yes," she whispered. "It was the best way. I have wanted . . . to see you. These weeks have seemed like months, years. Oh, when are we going to live, Kitt? Now it is but a wave of the hand, a glance of the eye, a word here and there. When, oh, when do we begin to live?"

St. John looked steadily into her eyes.

"We are living now, Roxane," he said. "There's something more in life than love, isn't there? Don't you feel it?"

"For you, possibly," she responded; "but not for me. All that I'm doing, Kitt, is for you."

"And don't you know," he returned, "that all I do is for you? Don't you know that I'm following out the plans that were conceived by you?"

She threw back her head in sheer admiration.

"And you are doing nobly, Kitt, nobly. You

have the real instinct, whilst I—I'm a pretty poor artisan. I can only act by subterfuge; but you, you do; you force; you seize. Only," she added with a puzzled air, "that is what I can't understand. How do you escape the law?"

St. John smiled a grim smile.

"That is something that nobody knows but I. Roxane, if I have one virtue, it is that I keep my secrets to myself." He turned to the canvas. "Is this what you desired to show me—this half-finished portrait of the man you love?"

"Love!" And she looked the scorn that she felt as she added: "How I hate the sight of him!"

"You could do worse, Roxane. But," he added, "you are not up to the mark on this piece of work. This is not one of your masterpieces. What could Bonwit think about it?"

"Being far from a masterpiece himself, friend Bonwit is no judge. How can one paint without an inspiration, and who could be inspired by Bonwit! Some day, Kitt, I shall paint your portrait, but not until we begin to live. No," she concluded hastily, "I didn't send for you to see Bonwit's picture; I sent for you to look upon another."

Then, before doing what she had to do, Roxane darted to the door and made sure that it was securely locked, examined the windows, and assured herself that there was no crack or crevice through which prying eyes might see; and now stepping to the Bonwit portrait, she drew it suddenly, swiftly, deftly aside, revealing another picture—a study in still life that made St. John hold his breath in sheer wonder and admiration.

“Great Heavens, Roxane!” he exclaimed exultantly; “this is a masterpiece! There is inspiration in that, all right.”

“Inspiration! Yes, Kitt, because it was done for you. Oh, I have worked so hard upon it!”

And, as Kittredge St. John stood there glancing alternately at the new canvas and the woman before him, there was borne in upon him the sudden realisation of all that the woman had done for him.

“You’re a marvel, a genius, Roxane!” he said. “Life is incomplete without you.” Roxane sighed; he went on dreamily: “Yes, it is as you say. Some day we shall begin to live.”

There was a silence; St. John was the first

to break it, for, turning to the canvas, he suddenly asked:—

“Roxane, when can I take this with me?”

Her reply came reluctantly, after some delay:—

“Any time you say.”

“And when may I use it?” he inquired, his whole attention hanging on her words.

“That is something that my friend Mr. Bonwit will tell me; and, when he tells me, I shall let you know.”

When St. John left the cupola that night, he carried with him, rolled into a cylinder under his arm, Roxane Bellairs’ clever picture of still life.

Some days later the cashier of the Manufacturers’ National Bank and Mr. Bonwit, its president, were closeted in the latter’s room in close consultation.

“I don’t suppose,” said Bonwit, “that this chap would dare to tackle another bank in town. Mordaunt’s was a rattle-trap affair, and he probably knew it.”

“Whoever he is, he’s undoubtedly clever. However, I’m not so sure that it was not this man St. John.”

"Nonsense! Why, St. John was miles from the place. Of course, some clever chap did the trick, some professional yeggman, that goes without saying. But Burke and O'Connell never saw St. John that night—they merely thought they did. My view is that they were on a little spree. Didn't you notice how confused they were when they tried to explain, on the stand, how the man got away from them in the face of their revolvers? No living man could get away as they described it! Besides, I had an interview—and so did Steele, of the Bankers' Club—with Burke, the next morning, and the man looked and acted like a man who had been on a spree. Any ordinary officer could have nabbed that thief, and I can't understand why they didn't."

"The fact remains," said the cashier, "that that Mordaunt job was the cleverest thing that has ever been done here."

"It looked to me like an inside job, and, the more I think of it, the more I believe it was. The cutting of the bars and the cutting of the window-pane were all a blind; in fact, I think most bank robberies are liable to be inside jobs; and that's what I'm protecting the Manufacturers' against."

"What have you done?"

"What I've done is this: Our night-watchmen are to stay out here in the corridor; the big vault door and the small safe are visible from here; they are not to go inside. They can see everything from here, absolutely everything. I'm going to have a new set of locks to keep the watchmen out; I'm going to see to it that nobody has access to the vault or to the safe at night. Of course, we think we can trust Mackerley, and we think we can trust Jim. But, suppose we don't trust anybody."

"I guess you're right," sighed the cashier. "But they're good watchmen," he added, "and don't drink. We ought to be safe enough."

But, notwithstanding that the Manufacturers' had been safe for many years, the improvements as suggested by Mr. Bonwit were adopted by the Board. And thus it came about that Mackerley, the head watchman, and Jim, his assistant, every night, turn and turn about, paced the corridor in full view of everything inside the bank, and more particularly in full view of the big vault door.

It happened, however, that one Saturday night,

a few weeks later, while Jim, the second watchman, was sitting in the bank's corridor smoking a cigar—a cigar that some customer of the bank had tendered to him on that day—his gaze straying lazily and sleepily from one window to the other, and from the small safe to the big vault, suddenly found himself staring, as in a dream, toward the big vault door. In an instant he was on his feet, gun in hand, rushing down the stairs into the basement and into Mackerley's little room. He found Mackerley reading an evening paper.

"Mackerley," he cried, shaking his arm fiercely, "there's a burglar in the bank! Come, come quick!"

"You're dreamin', Jim, dreamin'," Mackerley told him when he arrived on the scene.

"Dreamin' nothin'," retorted Jim. "I should think that I knew when I saw a thing with my own eyes!"

"Well, what did you see?" asked Mackerley.

Jim's grip tightened upon his chief's arm. He answered:—

"I saw a man come out of that vault not more than three minutes ago. Do you understand—three minutes ago."

"No, I don't understand," returned the other.
"How could he come out of the door when . . ."

"By George," interrupted Jim, "that's the funny part of it. He didn't come out of the door; he came out of the side of the vault, right near the door."

"The side of the vault! Why, he couldn't come out of the side of the vault; there's three feet of steel and brick and mortar there, and he didn't leave a hole."

"Whether he did or not, you can depend upon it when I tell you that I saw a man come out of the side of that vault not more than three minutes ago. He's somewhere in the bank."

"But what kind of a looking man was he?" Mackerley asked, still unbelieving.

"I can tell you that all right," answered Jim, "for I know who the man is. He's Kittredge St. John, a friend of our president's, a friend of the whole town. He saw me, too, and looked me full in the face as I looked at him. In fact, we stood like a pair of yaps for half a minute, looking squarely at each other, and then what do you think he did?"

"Well?"

"He drew a gun, actually pointed it at me, and I drew my gun and covered him; then, quick as a flash, he darted into that there room with his dress-suit case, shutting the door behind him."

For the first time Mackerley started. Before, when on his round, that door had been open, and now it was closed. Some agency had done it, some human agency; there must be some one in the bank.

"What are we going to do?" he now asked, thoroughly alarmed.

Jim looked at him hopelessly.

"Well," went on the other, "to begin with, we're not going to make fools of ourselves. That room has got bars on all its windows; nobody is going to pass through without our seeing him. The thing to do is to telephone to Bonwit." And, accordingly, he telephoned the president, who, pooh-poohing the story though he did over the wire, nevertheless hustled into his clothes and came down with his bunch of keys.

"It's up to you, Mr. Bonwit, to call up the police," said Mackerley; "Jim and I will go in and investigate."

Whereupon, Mr. Bonwit unlocked the barred

door leading into the bank and then retreated to the safety of the president's room, wiping the perspiration from his head and flooding his own sanctum with all the light that he could command.

"Now, Mackerley," he said, "you and Jim can investigate while I call up the police." But he didn't call up the police—that is, just then,—for no sooner had Mackerley placed his hand upon the door-knob of the suspected room than a muffled shot rang out and a bullet crashed through the door above the watchman's head.

"We've got him trapped at any rate, Jim," he said, trying the door once more and finding it locked. "He's in there and he can't get out."

Then he tiptoed, with the second watchman, back to the president, who, by this time, was in a panic of fear; but, before he reached Bonwit, his assistant turned to Mackerley and said:—

"Here's the very spot where he came out of the vault!"

For a fraction of a second they stood gazing upon the vault door, or upon what seemed to be the vault door, and then, full tilt, forgetting the man in the room beyond, they dashed down the

corridor and dragged the panic-stricken Mr. Bonwit into the bank.

"Mr. Bonwit," gasped Mackerley, "do you see that there—what is that thing?"

"What do you mean?" asked Bonwit.

"That," said Mackerley, pointing with a tremulous finger.

"Why, that's the vault door. What else could it be?"

"Are you sure?" persisted Mackerley. "Come and see . . ."

And then it was that Mr. Bonwit went over, and, to his great astonishment, he perceived that what had seemed to him to be the vault door was not the vault door, but a counterfeit presentment of it—a huge canvas, done in oils, that reproduced the vault door in all details.

"And it was out of here he came!" cried Jim; "right out of here."

The president's eyes followed the gesture of the second watchman.

"Out of the side of the vault," persisted Jim.

And again Mr. Bonwit's eyes bulged with astonishment, for the place indicated by his employee was not the side of the vault; it was another paint-

ing in still life on a strip of canvas not a foot wide, painted in dull stone colours. Bonwit gingerly lifted it up and, forgetting temporarily his fear, he stepped within. Inside this stage-setting was the real vault door, the painted canvas hanging having constituted a clever framework set up before it—a sort of box within which one man might move about. There was no man there now, but Mr. Bonwit, after placing his hand upon the handle of the genuine door, retreated in great consternation: the vault was open.

“Mackerley, see if there’s anything inside!” he ordered.

Mackerley, with his revolver in hand, drew back the bolts and threw wide the door, which brushed against the canvas on which its fellow had been painted. He found no man inside; in fact, he found scarcely anything else.

“The Western shipment has been stolen, Mr. Bonwit!” he exclaimed, his face as white as a sheet. “It’s gone—every bit of it. . . .”

“What!” roared Bonwit. “Here, let me look!”

He looked and found it all too true.

“Great Heavens, there’s a hundred thousand

dollars gone--gone, do you understand!" he cried out. "A hundred thousand dollars and more!"

The three men had not realised that they had been singularly inactive. The discovery of the painted door and sort of stage curtain, behind which a clever man had worked while they had looked on complacently for half the night, had paralysed, benumbed them.

Like most men in large banks, they were unused to robbery—although they are constantly on the lookout for it—and here was a cleverness that baffled them. When the burglar had adjusted the false front, and how he had done it, were mysteries which gave rise to immediate speculation. It was the certain loss of the big Western shipment of United States bank notes, however, that forced them into sudden action.

"Never fear, Mr. Bonwit," said Mackerley, "the man is in that room, and we're going to get him if it takes half of the police force in the town to do it."

"And don't forget, Mr. Bonwit," whispered Jim, "that I saw the man, with his dress-suit case, too, with them bills inside of it. And don't forget that the man was Mr. St. John."

"St. John! You're crazy, man! Those rum policemen also said they had seen St. John; but you're not drunk! Anyhow, St. John's a friend of mine; he's rich, straight as a string! What's the matter with you, Jim?"

"I tell you," returned Jim doggedly, "that I saw Mr. St. John. He looked me in the face for half a minute; I know what I know."

Bonwit thrust forth his hand, saying:—

"Why, Jim, you—you must be mistaken. You didn't believe that it was St. John that robbed the Mordaunt Bank, did you?"

"I didn't before; but I do now."

"Ah," said Bonwit, "every man in town has got St. John on the brain. I guess you were looking for him and thought you saw him."

"All this doesn't help us to get this chap that's in there!" suddenly exclaimed Mackerley.

"It does not," said Bonwit, and immediately he proceeded to ring up headquarters, and got the desk-sergeant on the wire. He told him briefly who he was and what he wanted, ending with:—

"Just a moment, and I'll put my second watchman on, and he'll tell you more about it."

After the desk-sergeant had despatched his reserves, the second watchman poured forth his tale into the transmitter.

"And the man I saw," he concluded, "was Mr. S. John, and no mistake about it."

"You're dreaming!" called back the sergeant. "Why, Kittredge St. John has just left here!"

"Just left where?" asked Jim.

"Just left headquarters; he's been here for half an hour."

"Half an hour? Why, it was not—it could not have been a half-hour ago that I saw him, face to face."

"You must be crazy!" came over the wire. "I tell you that Kittredge St. John has been here for a long while, and he's just left. Came in expressly to see about some woman's house being protected against this very burglar that you're talking about—came in with a man named Var-num, and they, dress-suit case and all, left together."

"Dress-suit case, did you say?" gasped Jim.

did. He had a real alligator one at that, with the best kind of crocodile-skin on it that I ever saw," responded the sergeant good-naturedly.

"Well, I'll be ——! Why, that's the same suit-case that he had up here."

"Anyhow, the reserves are on their way," wound up the sergeant; and a moment more and they had dashed round the corner and were going up the steps of the bank. Two of them had crept down the alley-way and covered the rear windows of the bank with their guns; two more were already breaking into the room.

"Turn out all the lights!" commanded the reserves. "He'll be in the dark, and we don't want to be targets."

Then, with two vigorous assaults upon the door, the lock snapped, and two reserves plunged tumultuously into the room beyond. Much to their surprise, it was as light as day within; likewise, much to their surprise, the room was empty—there was no one there.

One of the reserves immediately climbed up to one window and shook the bars; the bars resisted—they were as firm as a rock. He stepped to the next window and clutched the bars on that; with a rattle and a crash, they fell to the floor.

"Aha! it's the same trick, done by the same

man that did up the Mordaunt Bank! And, what's more, he's got away with the goods!"

"Not yet!" cried Jim. "Do you know where this St. John said he was going when he left headquarters?"

The reserve thought a moment.

"They were going to the club, I believe he said."

"Somebody follow him and get that dress-suit case!" exclaimed Jim excitedly. "That dress-suit case has got the goods!"

To the credit of the town of M——, be it said, that so well did they proceed about their business, that one of the reserves intercepted Mr. Kittredge St. John and Mr. Archie Varnum, as the two were about to enter the Iroquois Club.

The plain-clothes man detailed to do this duty watched them enter, watched St. John drop his dress-suit case near the entrance, and watched them pass on into the grill-room of the club. Then, in the absence of the hall-boy, and with some swift trick, known to plain-clothes men in general, and to this one in particular, he opened the dress-suit case and explored its recesses: it contained nothing save the articles for which it had been originally

intended—a full suit of evening clothes, serene in their blackness, empty as to pockets, but as to any of the bank-notes, constituting the Western shipment of the Manufacturers' National Bank, the suit-case was as guiltless as any suit-case could be.

Back in the bank, Mackerley's attention had been attracted to a small piece of paper found in the room in which the burglar had taken refuge. At first he thought it was a bank-clerk's memorandum; but, on looking closely at it, he found it to be something quite different, and he took it hastily to Mr. Bonwit.

The president of the Manufacturers' National looked upon something that read like this:—

Ndea vpbj npub cpykr
ibw gybsews rgiyapts
rwba rqwbruwa sewaa
ayur xpaw ribufgr

AQWWRGWPER.

This piece of paper together with the identification of Jim, the second watchman, were the only things which would serve in any way to connect any individual with the burglary.

The following morning, Burke, of headquarters, appeared at Mr. Bonwit's office.

"I understand," said Burke, "that all you've got out of this is a scrap of paper. Let me see the scrap."

Bonwit showed it to him; Burke merely glanced at it for a second, at the end of which he requested that a typewriter be brought to him, that he might "dope out" the contents of the paper.

"The first and second words, Mr. Bonwit," he explained, "mean Manufacturers' Bank, and the rest is just as easy."

"How do you know?" asked Bonwit, surprised.

"I suspected as soon as I saw it that some one had used the keyboard cipher."

"Keyboard cipher? I've heard of a good many ciphers, but I've never heard of that."

Burke smiled.

"Well, there are not many people who know about it, but I happen to. It was invented by a woman out in California. It's as easy as falling off a log. You can write a book in keyboard cipher, and any typewriter in the world can read it, but mighty few can ever get onto it, unless they knew there was such a cipher kicking around the world. Now, look here, Mr. Bonwit," he

went on, "just look at the typewriter. Do you see the keys? Take a mental picture of the arrangement of the keys."

Mr. Bonwit took a mental picture of the arrangement of the keys, and that mental picture was like this:—

Q W E R T Y U I O P
A S D F G H J K L
Z X C V B N M

"All you've got to do," resumed Burke, "when you want to use the standard keyboard cipher, is to write out your message correct and plain, and then go over it again, but, instead of using the letters that you used before, use each time the letter just ahead. When this person wrote out 'Mfrs.' for Manufacturers, and translated it into the cipher, you see just what he or she did. N on your board comes ahead of M; D ahead of F; E ahead of R; and A ahead of S. The result is you get 'Ndea' in place of 'Mfrs.' So all that you have got to do is to take the letter on the machine that comes after each one in this cipher, and we've got it. You can work it out yourself."

And Mr. Bonwit did work it out himself, and, when he had worked it out, this is what he read:—

Mfrs bank main vault
one hundred thousand tens
twenties dress suit case to-night

SWEETHEART.

As he was working it out, however, Major Holbrook strolled in to condole with him upon the robbery, for the affair had filtered into the ears of a few of the president's friends.

"What do you think that cipher is?" asked Mr. Bonwit.

The Major took it into his hands, placed it close to his eyes, and stared at it close to his glasses. Suddenly he sniffed the air, saying:—

"U'm, blest if I know. What is it, anyway?"

When Major Holbrook left the bank, he still sniffed the air as he asked himself:—

"Where in thunder have I detected that perfume before?"

Later, at the Club, Bonwit turned to Olyphant:—"Do you think St. John can explain these things?"

Olyphant slowly shook his head. "The police are positive of his guilt. It looks queer to me. What's your opinion, Major?"

Major Holbrook puffed for an instant. "I've watched every case closely. I've watched St. John. It is my study of St. John, not of the crimes, that convinces me there's something queer about it. When he's himself, I believe him honest as the day is long. But he's not always himself. At times he seems to me like a man under the baleful influence of some one else—a stronger personality."

"Whose personality?" queried Bonwit.

The Major paused before replying. "I think the influence of a woman."

"Miss Paget's influence is good," protested Mr. Bonwit.

The Major closed his eyes. "I was not thinking of Miss Paget," he returned.

CHAPTER XIII

MRS. SHACKLETON'S MATCHED PEARL NECKLACE

IN her studio in the cupola, Roxane paced irritably to and fro. It was a trifle past the hour that St. John was due at "The Ivies"—the Olyphant homestead, renamed since she had taken up her residence there. One would have gathered that it was, indeed, a welcome guest that she was about to entertain, from the look of a small table amply provided with glasses, cigarettes, and other articles of good cheer; but not so; for, a few moments later, St. John, stepping lightly through the window, found her in a difficult mood, and her manner towards him anything but that with which she had received him on former occasions.

"Roxane," he said at length, glancing toward the still unfinished portrait of Mr. Bonwit, "I note by the papers that the well-executed painting of the Manufacturers' vault door was done upon a canvas that was purchased in San Francisco." And, swinging Bonwit's picture about with its back to the light, he added: "I perceive that this

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one came from New York. It's just as well for us."

Roxane did not answer him; there was nothing in her that responded now to this tone of levity; instead, she seated herself on her work-bench and leaned toward him, her face tense, her figure rigid, her clenched hands between her knees.

"Kitt," she began, "I sent for you."

"Yes," he answered, bracing himself as for some expected shock; "and, as usual, when you send I come."

"I sent for you," she went on, "to inquire how long you intend to keep up this affair with Dorothy Paget? Really, I'll not stand any more nonsense from you. My mind is quite made up. I'll put you to the test . . ."

"Put me to any test you will. You don't seem to understand, Roxane, that, although I seem to be making love to another woman, in reality I'm not."

"Please don't repeat that—you've said it already too many times."

"Some day you will understand," he said, and, walking over to the table, he added with a smile: "You're not very hospitable, Roxane! Aren't you going to . . . ?"

"Yes," she broke in unexpectedly, ignoring his question, "and I mean to understand in a day not far off; a day fixed and definite."

"What day?" he asked, helping himself to a glass of Scotch whiskey, which he proceeded to mix into a highball.

"The Tony Shackletons' fortnight at Rangeley."

St. John started.

"Are you going to be there?" he inquired.

"Certainly. And you?" she returned, lighting a cigarette and letting the smoke come slowly from her mouth.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I must be there, but not for two or three days after the start."

Roxane raised her eyebrows.

"Why the delay?" she asked, biting through her cigarette with irritation.

He smiled grimly.

"Everybody in town that's anybody is going to be there, Roxane, and everybody that's anybody will shut up his town house for the occasion. That's why I shall be a trifle late."

"I begin to see," she answered, laughing a lit-

tle stiffly. "Every town house will yield its reward for your tardiness, I suppose." There was a pause. Presently she asked: "Whose town house have you picked out, Kitt?"

"I was leaving that for you to say," he said briefly.

"You honour me. And yet I think I can pick out at least one that will repay you. . . ."

"Whose?"

"That I shall have to let you know later. Meantime"—and she leaned once more toward him, regarding him with the strange expression on her face with which she had welcomed him when he came—"meantime, let me ask you a question: You know Rangeley, the Tony Shackletons' country place?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, Rangeley is the place of trysts—a place where many matches have been made. I warn you right here against any trysts with anybody but myself."

St. John looked down at her quickly and caught a glimpse of the danger that lurked in her eyes.

"It will be a sort of Eden for you and me," she went on quietly. "When every one is away

you and I can rove unseen through the wildernesses. It's our chance, Kitt, the first we have had since"—she drew a long sigh—"since—well, three years and more ago."

"But, Roxie, we must not be seen together. Don't you see I can't . . ."

"I see," she sneered; "you don't want Dorothy Paget to . . ."

"Nothing of the kind!" he broke in hotly. "You don't understand, you won't understand that . . ."

"There's just this about the matter," Roxane persisted stubbornly, "if you can't make love to me openly, then I shall see to it that you make love to no one else. If you do, what happens afterwards is on your head."

They—Roxane, Tony Shackleton, and Mrs. Tony—were sitting on the veranda of Oakleigh, the country-seat of the Shackletons at Rangeley, when the latter suddenly held up her hands and cried out excitedly:—

"Tony, I've done a most tremendously stupid thing! I've left my necklace in the house in town!"

"Which necklace?" demanded Roxane, with a slight twitch of her eyelids.

"Why, that beautiful matched pearl one that Tony gave me! I should have put it in the safe-deposit vault. How stupid of me!"

"But," ventured her husband, with unruffled calm, "you did lock it in your boudoir safe, I hope?"

"Most assuredly, yes, that part is all right. But boudoir safes are no longer safe; are they, Roxane? Especially since our friend Kitt has been so active." She laughed heartily.

"Poor Kitt," sighed Tony. "If there were a dozen murders in M——, they would all be laid at his door, and just because a couple of numskull detectives imagined they saw him rob a bank."

"But don't you think it wise, my dear, to go back into town or to have Tony go back and get the necklace?" inquired Roxane, with studied concern.

Tony yawned.

"Not on your life!" he exclaimed genially. "I'm too comfortable out here in Rangeley looking at you, my dear Roxane. Besides," he added,

"I don't know Mrs. Tony's combination, and, what's more, I don't want to know it. Why, the town would be accusing me next of stealing my rich wife's jewels!"

Roxane rose, and, seating herself on the wicker ottoman next to Mrs. Tony, suggested that Mrs. Tony either go back and remedy the fault or have her servants attend to the matter.

"My servants! Why, Roxane, what are you thinking of? I wouldn't let them know that that necklace was in my bedroom safe for the world! I'll take a chance that nothing happens—nothing ever happens to us; does it, Tony dear?"

"I jolly well wish that something would happen to us," grumbled her husband. "That reminds me," he went on, "when is Kittredge St. John going to confer his presence on us? He'll wake us up, dear old Kitt!"

"Not if Dorothy Paget is around," glibly returned his wife. "They'll simply take themselves to some cosey nook and never leave it until—why, Kitt used to have some life in him, but he has no eyes and no voice for anybody but Dorothy. This love-making, Roxane, is a wonderful thing. Before I married Tony, I . . ."

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"For Heaven's sake, Roxane," broke in Tony, "don't you fall in love! . . ."

The widow emitted a little scream.

"Oh, but I have, haven't I? So rumour says, anyhow."

"You're welcome to Bonwit," continued Tony, "if you'll only be yourself; but St. John certainly has forgotten that he lives."

"Life with him, apparently, is one grand sweet dream," interposed Mrs. Tony.

"I'm real sorry that he's coming down," said Tony. "He'll be an absent-minded beggar from the moment he strikes Oakleigh—that's what he'll be."

It was, perhaps, fifteen minutes later that Roxane excused herself and sought her rooms on the next floor. Once there she locked her door and sat down at a little desk and wrote a missive all in cipher, which, if the astute Burke had laid his eyes upon—which he never did,—would have been translated thus:—

Matched Pearl Necklace worth Fifty Thousand, if a cent, in Mrs. Tony Shackleton's boudoir. The safe is an imitation medicine chest in the last room of the suite. New design.

SWEETHEART.

"So much for the bait," whispered Roxane to herself. "And now, Mr. St. John, it's for you to say whether I shall insert the hook. It's up to you. . . ."

Now she went to her trunk and took from it a bottle of violet ink and a very small gold pen; and, in a perfectly disguised hand, she wrote the following:

POLICE HEADQUARTERS,

Town of M—.

Gentlemen:—To-morrow night, at nine o'clock, the Tony Shackleton house will be robbed. Kittredge St. John will commit the robbery. He will break into the second-story window in the rear—his usual method. In Mrs. Shackleton's bedroom there is a safe in which is a matched pearl necklace worth fifty thousand dollars. St. John always knows who and what is in a house—he makes no mistakes as to that. Therefore, if you go near Shackletons' to-day, to-night, to-morrow, or to-morrow night, before St. John is within, you will make a mistake. You must wait from a distance—neighbouring yards, if you like. Cover every side of the house in the quietest manner, and when he enters, close in upon him. The Shackletons are not at home, as you know. The servants are alone. There's one thing, however, that you don't know: the servants in that house entertain their friends to-morrow night below stairs. You may not know how much they will drink—they and their friends, nor what they will drink; Kittredge St. John knows that as well as that at nine o'clock his field will be clear.

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The hint which I'm furnishing you costs you nothing if you take it; it may cost you a good deal to disregard it.

X. Y. Z.

Burke laid down the letter—for it reached him and he read it. He fairly jumped at the possibilities it contained. St. John had become his common enemy. Even if the warning were only a joke, it would be one entirely innocuous—for Burke already had determined to take the advice of the unknown adviser.

"The first thing to do," he said to himself, becoming suddenly active, "is to surround that Shackleton house with eyes that see and ears that hear, but that are unseen and unheard by any one."

The task proved to be not a difficult one. For the Tony Shackletons occupied the end house of what the town of M—— knew as "The Hill"—a row of six brown-stone houses, honeycombed with huge plate-glass windows, that presented to the eye a phalanx as solid and invulnerable as the aristocracy which they housed within their walls.

The fateful night found Burke, by methods at which he was an adept, satisfied beyond all question that there was no stranger within the Shackleton gates. So that, as the invisible cordon of un-

seen and unheard sleuths surrounded the house, it was with the certainty that no eye could enter there without their knowledge.

And, as the evening wore on, Burke began to realise that his unknown informant knew what he or she was talking about. In the basement of the Shackleton house, beginning with the legitimate supper hour, sounds of revelry were heard. Visitors were there, not one of whom, by any possibility, could have been mistaken for Kittredge St. John; besides, all these were accounted for later.

As nine o'clock approached, the unseen cordon drew nearer to the house; and still there was nothing of St. John.

Then, all of a sudden, there was a scream—a scream that came from one of the rooms that constituted Mrs. Shackleton's suite; and, following the scream, a window was thrown open and the shrill tones of a housemaid issued therefrom.

"Murder! Thieves! Murder! Police!" cried this young woman in hysterical tones.

In an instant Burke was on the second floor, climbing the stairs with the hilarious group of

house-servants, who were somewhat far gone in their libations of the evening.

Darting into the corridor that led to the boudoir of Mrs. Shackleton, Burke met the housemaid, trembling, laughing hysterically, weeping slightly, and still shrieking for help. He caught her by the arms and held her fast and spoke to her in the only tone that can conquer hysterics—the tone of command, of rebuke.

“What did you see, girl?” he said. “No nonsense! Tell me—quick!”

The girl calmed down on the instant.

“There,” she said, pointing toward the inner room, “there—I saw him as he opened the safe—saw him as he took the necklace and hid it in his pocket. I saw him do it all! . . .”

Burke literally dragged her into the bedroom. There was no doubt about it, the clever thief of the town of M—— had been once more at work. The safe door, diminutive as it was, stood ajar, and the safe rifled of its contents!

“You—you saw him take the necklace?” questioned Burke.

“Yes,” answered the girl. “It was the Madam’s big, white pearl necklace . . .”

"An' you saw him put it in his pocket? Quick now!"

"Yes, yes, it was him—it was St. John—the man that . . ."

Burke's grip tightened upon her elbows.

"Are you sure it was Kittredge St. John?" he demanded. "Come now, you're positive? . . ."

"Sure. Don't I know the man?"

"Let no one leave the house!" roared Burke. "No one can leave the house—my men have surrounded it. The first man that tries to get away, gets shot."

For a moment he held the startled, tipsy servants with his glance, scanning the countenance of each in turn; then, leaning from the window, he called in two of his men, and together they ransacked the house from top to bottom; and, as they ransacked it, the truth was borne in upon them that the burglar had been at work for many moments, possibly hours. For not only had he looted the safe, but he had ransacked every bureau drawer, and other likely receptacles. The whole house, as in the twinkling of an eye, seemed to have been turned topsy-turvy; and yet, search as they might, they could not find the culprit.

The officers were completely baffled.

Burke took the maidservant, still in hysterics, down to headquarters and examined her thoroughly, while his men searched every servant and guest. When it was all over, Burke was compelled to admit his defeat.

"There's not a ghost of a doubt," said Burke to his superior, "that it was the same chap that pulled off the others! But, whether it was St. John or not, that's another question. But, whoever it is, I'll get him yet or lose my job."

Burke, in person, took the first train for Rangley to see the Tony Shackletons. Mrs. Shackleton was amenable. At length she asked the officer what were his reasons for believing that Mr. St. John was responsible for the act.

"It can't be any one else," Burke assured her doggedly.

"Hold on here!" said Shackleton, after a moment. "What time did this happen?"

"Some time before nine o'clock. The maid saw him just about the stroke of nine," he explained.

"It might have happened before, though," suggested Tony Shackleton.

" . . . any time between seven o'clock and nine o'clock to-night," admitted Burke.

Shackleton rose and closed the door.

" St. John is a friend of mine," he said, " and, of course, to me this sounds mighty preposterous. But, as the saying goes, ' usually where there's smoke there's fire. ' " There was silence for a moment; then, turning an inquisitorial glance upon his wife, Shackleton went on: " My dear, where was St. John at nine o'clock to-night? "

Mrs. Tony thought for some time, for her mind, somehow, worked slowly. The fact is, this quiet conversation was being held in the wee sma' hours in Tony's den; they had only just gone to sleep when she was awakened by the officer's arrival.

" Just a minute, officer," she said, " and I'll tell you. . . . "

" One question, Mr. Shackleton," said Burke. " Was St. John missing at any time durin' the evenin' ? "

Shackleton smiled in a puzzled sort of way.

" Why, yes—that is, he might have been. I saw him take his machine down the road about

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four o'clock in the afternoon. I don't remember him later. And yet . . ."

"Now I have it!" suddenly cried Mrs. Tony. "You and I, Tony, saw Kittredge with some one from sundown until . . ."

"Where did we see him?" broke in her husband quickly.

"Come, let me show you," explained Mrs. Tony, leading them through the deserted and dimly lighted halls.

They followed her to the big living-room, where she pointed to a corner screened by an artful arrangement of furniture.

"Now you remember, Tony, don't you?" she went on in positive tones. "They were there for hours. Roxane saw them, too. We talked about it."

"You're right—I remember now. St. John and Miss Paget were together all evening, officer," confirmed her husband.

"Could he have done it in the afternoon?" suddenly put in his wife.

Burke slowly shook his head.

"I think not," he answered. "Of course," he added, "he could have been to town and back

here in no time with that car of his. But it's my opinion that he never got into your house in the afternoon. You're sure that he was here this morning, last night, and the night before?"

"I'm sure he was," said Mrs. Shackleton. "Just a moment, if you please." She rang a bell; a sleepy servant answered it. "Gorman," said she, "will you see if Mrs. Bellairs has retired? If not, ask her to step here very quietly, if she will."

Roxane came in directly and submitted to an examination by Burke. At the end he shook his head, saying:—

"You knew that Mrs. Shackleton's town house was broken into to-night?"

"What's that?" answered Roxane, surprised out of herself.

"Was broken into to-night," repeated Burke quietly, "an' a beautiful pearl necklace stolen from the safe along with other things—stolen, as I believe, by Mr. St. John."

There could have been nothing in the world more honest than the glance of absolute astonishment that appeared on Roxane's face.

"I can't believe—surely you don't think it was he . . . ?" she said.

". . . never surer of anything in my life, madam," came from Burke.

"And you caught him?" she asked, with something like triumph now on her face; but her countenance fell perceptibly upon the officer's reply.

"Apparently most all of his time here is accounted for. It's a puzzle. An' yet I insist that he's the man what's got the goods."

Mrs. Bellairs returned to her rooms with vengeful thoughts in her heart and muttering to herself through clenched teeth:—

"How did you get away from me? I thought I'd teach you a lesson that you would not soon forget. I thought that this would be the last time that you'd give Roxane Bellairs the cold shoulder. However, you're not safe yet, Kittredge St. John, never fear."

As for Tony Shackleton, he ordered out the big machine and, unknown to their guests, together with Mrs. Tony and Burke, shot back into town. With Burke at their heels, they entered their town house, pressed swiftly through room after room, examined door after door and window after win-

dow, put their servants through a rigid course of examination, and ended up in being quite as mystified as was Burke himself.

As they were examining the last room at the top of the house, something caught the eye of Mrs. Shackleton. She had switched off the light in this room, and Burke and Tony already had left it, when in an instant she switched on the light again and called them back.

"One moment, officer," she said. "Will you help Mr. Shackleton to move this wardrobe? I failed to look behind it."

"I did," declared Burke, "an' there's nothin' there but wall."

"I know, but I want to look behind it."

With many groans on the part of Tony and a few swift shoves on the part of the officer, the wardrobe was moved out; there was nothing to be seen but wall-paper.

"Why, this is fresh wall-paper, Mr. Burke," she instantly declared. It was clear to her that it had just been put there. "Don't you see how fresh it is?" she went on, examining its pattern with the eye of one who knew its former appearance.

Tony laughed.

"Your old wardrobe has been up against it and kept it fresh, my dear. The rest of your room is faded by the light."

She shook her head.

"I'm satisfied that this is fresh paper," she maintained sturdily; and, going over to it, placed her hand not only upon, but clear through it. It gave way like a shell, or like what it was, wall-paper without any wall behind it.

Tony looked aghast.

"Good Heavens, what does it mean?" he exclaimed.

With a quick movement, his wife tore away a handful of the wall-paper, and Burke, with another quick movement, did the rest. When they had finished, there appeared before them a new, clean aperture in the wall, large enough to admit the body of a child—large enough for a clever criminal, if he were clever enough, to worm his way through.

"Where does it lead?" asked Burke.

"Why, into the next house," gasped Mrs. Tony.

"The vacant house?" asked Burke.

"Vacant!" cried Tony. "Yes, it's vacant, but

the Van Cleves' watchman is in there, has been in there looking after the stuff that they've already moved in."

"Then, the watchman must have done this!" declared Mrs. Tony. "Nobody else could. . . ."

Burke turned to Shackleton.

"Mr. Shackleton," he said, "will you tell a couple of my men to come here. I beg pardon," he quickly corrected, and passed out, returning in an instant with his assistants.

An instant more and the two men had wriggled through the hole in the wall. Tony tried to wriggle through, but failed in the attempt—there was too much of him.

Once in the vacant room, Burke and his men turned their lanterns into every corner and upon the débris that rested underneath the hole. There, piled as neatly as a stack of chips, were the bricks that had been taken from the wall and the mortar that had held them. For the rest, on that floor there was nothing but vacancy and darkness.

Step by step, with drawn revolvers, Burke and his men examined every inch of this house into which the Van Cleves had already begun to move; they found the first lot of mahogany furniture on

the first floor, but that was all. There was no watchman—in fact, they never found the watchman.

Burke went back to the girl who had screamed the night before.

"Girl," he said to her, "you know St. John when you see him; did you also know this watchman who was taking care next-door?"

"Yes," she answered breathlessly. "I knew him, all right; I've seen him for three days."

Burke held her with his glance.

"Has he been in the house all these three days?" he queried.

"Sure. Everybody will tell you that."

"Did he look like St. John?" went on Burke, although he knew that he did not.

"Oh, Lor', no!" returned the girl. "Why, that watchman had twice as big a beard as Mr. St. John and twice as big a nose—besides, he was twice as big. What's more, he was paralysed down one side. Don't you know, Mr. Burke?"

"I do," replied Burke, going carefully over the ground in his mind; and, when he was once more alone, he blinked his eyes in uncertainty.

"That watchman was around here for three

whole days and night," he told himself. "An' he can't be St. John, because St. John was down at Rangeley. On the other hand, that watchman could never have gotten through that hole upstairs or do what that fellow did who got through that hole." He shook his head and added, nevertheless, a moment later: "Burke, you're still bankin' on St. John!"

CHAPTER XIV

A PURSUIT IN PRIVATE

"Miss PAGET is not at home, madam."

The footman and Roxane faced each other in the spacious hallway of the Paget house.

"Not at home!" returned Roxane, apparently annoyed, although it was because she knew that Dorothy would not be at home that she had called.

"But I'm sure that it was this afternoon we were to drive to . . ." she mused in distressed tones; and, drawing forth from her bag her little note-book, she scanned her list of engagements. "Yes," she went on, nodding with certainty, "it was this afternoon. One of us has made a mistake." Presently her face brightened, and she added: "Perhaps I'm early—she may return at any moment. Didn't she say what time she'd return?"

"Yes, madam," replied the footman; "she will not return until Thursday afternoon. Is there anything . . . ?"

Roxane wrinkled her brow.

"I think not," she responded, "though you might give her my message—that is, no," she added as an after-thought, "I shall write her direct to-night, I think."

Whereupon the footman retreated to a silver salver on the table, took from it a card, on which appeared a pencilled memorandum, and handed it to her, remarking:—

"This is Miss Paget's address; she is staying with her cousin there."

Roxane copied the memorandum literally, which read merely as follows:

Care of Belleporte Inn, Stormhaven, Conn.

Returning to her victoria, Roxane gave a brief direction; and, ten minutes later, she was standing at Mrs. Shackleton's reception-room door, being greeted by that lady.

"Our afternoon to drive, dear," said Roxane. "Had you forgotten?"

"Forgotten!" echoed Mrs. Tony. "I thought you were never coming. I've been ready for at least half an hour."

Roxane drew forth her little note-book, and said:—

"Possibly I am late, but I always keep appointments—you will acknowledge that. My little book never makes mistakes."

"I grant you that, Roxane," conceded Mrs. Shackleton.

"It's awfully good of you to come," remarked Mrs. Bellairs; "I want cheering up."

"So do I," responded her guest, "and nobody has come around—not even Dorothy. Indeed, I haven't seen her for days and days. She can't be at home."

Roxane looked her astonishment as she said:—

"I didn't know that she was away."

"Even Kittredge St. John seems to have effaced himself lately," went on Mrs. Tony. "We like him immensely and he dines with us when he can; but Tony hasn't been able to rake him up for nights."

The fascinating Mrs. Bellairs smiled a polite little smile, and observed:—

"Kittredge St. John is always an unknown quantity; he is here one minute and gone the next. One never knows where to put one's finger on him, so it seems."

She was quite right. For days she had stifled

an overwhelming passion to see him, to hear his voice, to feel his eyes upon her, until the suspense had become unbearable. It was this suspense that had driven her to Dorothy's threshold; and the information derived there had confirmed her fears. She had written to Kittredge, she had called him up; but there was no answer to her letters, and the message over the wire had become monotonous: "Mr. St. John is nowhere in the house." At last the conviction had forced itself upon her that he was nowhere within the town.

"To find out—to find out for sure," thought Roxane to herself, and the phrase kept ringing through her head all during her drive with Mrs. Tony, whose conversation, fortunately, was of the kind that required but little response, for that lady's method of cheering herself up was to find a good listener; and Roxane, on this occasion, certainly answered the purpose, if silence be synonymous with listening.

But the drive ended at last. Mrs. Tony expressed herself as being once more toned up; and Roxane hied herself to "The Ivies," locked herself in a room, and began to plan things.

"To find out for sure," she said aloud, consulting a long list of addresses with which Kitt had once furnished her. Finally she selected The Dav-enport Detective Agency, 140 Broadway, New York. To be sure, it was the first time she had ever thought of enlisting aid of this legitimate character—men of this ilk, in general, were her traditional enemies as well as Kitt's—and the list which he had furnished was for purposes of evasion, and not employment. However, that made the thing seem to her all the safer.

She immediately sat down and wrote a telegram to the detective agency. It read as follows:—

Meet me your office ten o'clock to-night.

MRS. X.

Before sending it, however, she decided upon a preliminary course of conduct. She sat down at her telephone and called up Kitt's apartment-house.

"Wait a minute, I'll connect you," said the boy at the other end.

"Is he there?" she demanded.

"Don't know—but I'll connect you, anyway," returned the boy.

He did so; and, much to her surprise, a voice broke in immediately upon the wire—a voice that she could have sworn was Kitt's.

"Hello—who's this?" he called.

Roxane did not answer. She was not certain just what to do; moreover, the wire buzzed badly. If it were Kitt's voice, and if Kitt were at the other end, well and good. She felt sure that he would come to her if she asked him to. And yet, that wouldn't satisfy the doubts within her. The little devils kept pronging her, and immediately her rich soprano voice swung into an alto.

"I want to speak to Mr. St. John," she said.

Kitt's voice—she was sure it was Kitt's now—answered:—

"Why, he's—in fact, he's out of town."

"Can you tell me where?"

There was an instant's hesitation at the other end of the wire, and then her question was answered with a question.

"Who is this inquiring, if you please?"

"This is Miss Paget talking," said Roxane.

Something like an exclamation seemed to drift over the wire, and then went on the voice:—

"That's funny, Miss Paget—I beg your pardon, but Mr. St. John has been away for several days, and . . ."

"Can I reach him by letter?" asked Roxane, now thoroughly convinced that Kitt was talking to her.

"He's somewhere in Connecticut, Miss Paget."

"Not at Stormhaven?"

"Why, yes, I believe that is the place."

"He's not at the Belleporte Inn?" again queried Roxane, her tones still well disguised.

"That's the place, Miss Paget," returned the voice.

Roxane gave discretion to the winds.

"That's queer—very queer," she murmured.

"Why, I'm at the Belleporte myself, and I haven't seen anything of Mr. St. John."

"The deuce you say!" cried Kitt's voice.

"Why, are you sure?" Some strange emotion seemed to agitate the well-modulated voice, and Roxane took quick note of it. "Aren't you mistaken, Miss Paget?" he went on. "I'm quite sure that Mr. St. John has been there—is there now; aren't you?"

The last two words disturbed Roxane's equa-

nimity; moreover, they seemed ironical, though, perhaps, they were not intended to be.

"Not quite sure," she answered crisply.

"Because," went on Kitt, "I had him on the wire at the Belleporte not five minutes ago. Really, is this Miss Dorothy Paget—or some other Miss Paget?"

"It's Miss Paget," returned Roxane icily. "But, pray, who are you?"

There was no hesitation at the other end.

"This is the day clerk," said the same voice.

Roxane rang off. She was in a rage not only with herself, but with Kitt. Why had she done this thing? Had Kitt recognised her voice? Was he making fun of her? What did it all mean, anyway?

"I'll call him up again, at any rate," said Roxane to herself, "and tell him who I am, and have it out with him."

Again she got the apartment-house on the wire, and again the boy answered and said he would connect her, which he did. But this time without result—there was no Kitt at the other end of the wire.

"Can't get him," said the boy. "It's no use . . ."

"There is use," retorted Roxane, now quite desperate, "and I'm sure he's there. Try again."

The boy tried again and again, but with the same result.

"Give me the clerk, then," said Roxane.

Whereupon the clerk came to the 'phone, and, to Roxane's dismay, his voice was as different from the voice of Kitt as the night is from the day. The day clerk also tried, but also failed in getting Mr. St. John.

"He's not in the house, madam," at length he informed her; "and, to tell you the truth, I think he's out of town, though he may be back at any time. Who shall I say called him up, please?"

"Don't say," was Roxane's enigmatic answer, and rang off.

A moment later she sent her telegram to New York. It was ten o'clock to the second when a heavily veiled woman entered the building at No. 140 Broadway, New York. She had, indeed, chosen well the place and time. Broadway was deserted, and, save for the light in the three windows of Davenport's Detective Agency on the

third floor at No. 140, that building also was practically deserted. The elevators, of course, were not running, and Roxane slowly climbed the steps. She was glad to do so, for it gave her voice a breathless tinge when she reached the office. Once inside, however, she glanced about her anxiously, but was quite reassured when she noted that but one man occupied the office—a man at a desk in a far corner, one that she had never seen before. The man was half-asleep, and it was quite apparent that he had stayed there for one purpose only: to see her, in accordance with her telegram.

The man placed a chair, and said as he looked her over:—

“Have a seat, lady.”

Roxane seated herself, but did not lift her veil.

“What can we do for you?” queried the man.

Roxane did not answer at once. In fact, for the first time, her purpose began to flag.

“I—I hardly know how to tell you,” she answered in a voice filled with agitation. “Let me think a little.”

Then, step by step, she went over the ground, knowing full well that what she was doing held

not only danger for Kitt, but danger for herself as well—the danger in directing the attention of a detective upon her and Kitt. And yet, it was better to have the suspense over; she couldn't go back to the hours of anguish; she must go on.

She drew forth a photograph and passed it to Davenport's man.

"Do you know that man?" she asked.

She watched his face carefully for any sign of recognition, and sighed with relief when there was none.

"No, I certainly do not," returned the other.

Roxane produced her purse.

"I am willing to pay," she began.

The man nodded.

"You want unusual secrecy, I understand."

"Yes. If I am right, it won't matter so much, perhaps, but if I am wrong . . ."

"In either case you can trust me. We've got a man who was intended for a clam, he's so tight. But where do we pick up the clue?"

"There's nothing difficult about that," went on Roxane. "The man is supposed to be at The Belleporte, Stormhaven, Conn. He will probably be there until Thursday of this week."

The detective poised his pencil delicately in the air.

"With a lady?" he queried pleasantly and professionally, for he assumed this to be a matter of divorce.

"That is immaterial," returned Roxane shortly. "What I want is this: I want your man to go there—stay there—find him there, if he can. If he's there, then your man must stick to him like a leech—know his every movement until he comes back."

"Our man was cut out for a leech," commented the detective.

"Let me warn you about one thing," said Roxane; "this man you are about to follow is sharper than any man on your whole force—make no mistake about that. Moreover, your man must never be suspected; he will be tricked if he is. He must be invisible. . . ."

"Madam," said the detective impressively, "he's a cross between a shadow and a ghost. We'll fix it for you. Where do we report?"

Roxane had a private telephone number and a private wire in M——. And much as she would

have preferred to keep her whereabouts unknown, nevertheless she gave this number to the agency.

"And there's one other thing," she added, just before leaving; "you want the fastest car in town. This man has a machine that is part and parcel of him. He is here one instant, and the Lord only knows where, the next."

"What make is his car?" queried the detective.

"I couldn't tell you," faltered Roxane, with memories of Champenois et Cie. lingering in her mind. "But—but it's a racer—a very rapid one."

The detective grunted.

"We've got a car that's a cross between a flash of lightning and a wireless message. It'll do—believe me—there ain't no car that can beat it."

"What make is it?" asked Roxane, eyeing the agent curiously.

The detective flipped the photograph over on its face, and then he answered.

"It's a Hermes, made by Champenois," he informed her, as he bowed her out. "Our man gets on the job to-night, and reports to you twice a day. Good-night!"

The following day Roxane received a telephone message over her private wire.

"We've reckoned up your man," said a voice, so like the voice of the man in the Davenport office that she wondered if he, himself, was the clam and the leech on the cross between the shadow and the ghost. "Looks just like the picture. Spotted his car--can't tell its make."

"That's the man" quickly returned Roxane. "And where is he?"

"Playing tennis on the grounds with a Miss Paget. He's with her most of the time; eats at her table at the Inn; golfs with her; rides with her."

"How long has he been there?"

"Long as she has; at least, that's the report I get from a dozen different sources."

Roxane's mind went back to her last telephone conversation with Kitt's apartment.

"Has he been there all the time?" she queried.

"My report is that he has, but I'm not quite sure. His blamed car is in use off and on—and it ain't everybody that knows about his movements."

Roxane was not satisfied, and she asked:—

"But was he there all day yesterday—afternoon and evening?"

"I'm pretty sure he was," returned the sleuth.
"Tell you how it was: his car went out about five—him and the girl. Lots of other cars went out, too. Crowd went over to the Lodge for supper—his car getting there about five-thirty, and, so far's the car's concerned, it stayed there until eleven-thirty, and then he drove the girl home. Meantime . . ."

"Yes, what of him?" came eagerly from Roxane.

"Accounts differ. Some of the waiters saw him; others missed him at odd times. But there's lots of balconies and such—ever been to the Lodge out here? I know it like a book, and, whether he was in the Lodge or out of it off and on, can't say. But he did take the girl there and bring her away. I got here at four this morning, and I'm looking at him now."

There were other reports during the day, all more or less of the same nature. And there was no question but that Kitt St. John had taken advantage of opportunity—was playing freely a double game with herself and Dorothy Paget! She had gone so far in her private conversation with Davenport's man as to inquire specifically into evi-

dences of the sentimental attitude of the man under surveillance. Davenport's man had said, with the ring of truth in his voice, that every day he had seen, while looking down a woodland path near the Inn, what appeared to be at one time a kiss, and at another time a kiss and a hug.

"Which," confided Davenport's agent, "ain't just the way a married man should act when he's away from home. I'll leave it to you, Mrs. St. John, if it is?"

Roxane silently agreed with him, but informed him, curtly, that she was not Mrs. St. John, and that it was immaterial as to whether Mr. St. John was a married man.

"However, there's one thing that I want to know. How long does it take from New York to Stormhaven?" she asked.

"In a Hermes?"

"Yes."

"I did it, early morning, in an hour."

Roxane was puzzled.

"There must be something about Kitt's car," she told herself, "that I don't understand. Moreover, there's something about him that I'll never understand, either."

It was on Wednesday morning that she got a hurried ring, and the agent's voice sounded once more in her ear.

"They're off to Boston," he said breathlessly; "him and the girl in his car, and some cousins in another car. They're going to spend to-night and part of to-morrow at the Touraine; then to Brookline for a few hours, and after that home. Good-bye! I'm off in the Hermes to reckon them up!"

Three hours later there was another hurried ring, and a voice still more breathless commanded her attention.

"This is Davenport's man," gasped the voice. "I'm having hard, hard luck, lady—chased 'em all right, fine, until they swung onto the Boston road—they're on it now somewhere's away ahead—a bunch of 'em, with his car in the lead! But I've been walking for eight miles steady."

"Walking?" she echoed.

"Yes, Hermes broke down—worked like Satan to fix it, but couldn't. Other cars stopped and tried to fix it, too, but nobody could—and there was not a telephone for miles. Just got here, however, and 'phoned to let you know that I was

still game. I'll pick up the trail at the Touraine in Boston to-night, sure, and call you up again. I'll have to take a train in unless I can get another car, you see."

Roxane was beside herself.

"Be sure you get the trail again!" she cried.

For a long time after she had hung up the receiver, Roxane sat musing upon the certainty that Kitt had fastened his affections upon Dorothy Paget; and, as she sat, she became conscious of a peculiar sensation that she was not alone. She looked uncertainly about her, but nothing was unusual; then suddenly in the cupola above—for the cupola was directly over her boudoir—she heard the stealthy footsteps of a man—at least, she thought she did—and started for the winding staircase in the next room, to determine whether any one might be above; but, before she reached it, the telephone bell called her back.

"Lady, lady," called the sleuth's voice over the wire, "good news, good news! I 'phoned ahead to find out where they were, and what do you think? One of their cars broke down on ahead, about two hours or more ago!"

"His car?"

"No, somebody else's, and the whole crowd stopped and are trying to fix it. They're at it now."

"Is he at it now, also?"

"The report I get is that the whole crowd is stopped, so I suppose he's stopped, too."

"Follow them as soon as you can—keep him in sight!" cried Roxane quite aloud, and, hanging up the receiver, started to go; but, as she did so, she started back in fright, for a man was standing at her side.

"Keep whom in sight?" queried the man pleasantly. "What are you up to now, Roxane, my dear?"

Roxane clutched his arm to see if he was real, for the man was none other than Kittredge St. John!

"Just dropped in to make you a little call," he said. "I'm glad to find you in."

CHAPTER XV

THE LEOPARD'S SPOTS

NOTWITHSTANDING that Miss Dorothy Paget kept with her, as a companion, an aged aunt, she was the mistress of her own home, where she entertained, not lavishly but very well. Consequently, on her reception nights her house was sure to be crowded. However, with the exception of one large reception, St. John had never attended any of her functions, pleading always some excuse; and it was with some little difficulty that she finally prevailed upon him to attend her last little dinner of the season.

The dinner was about half-over. People had begun to talk volubly—as they always do once the ice is broken and their appetites have somewhat abated.

“It’s absurd!” one man was saying. “The police claim they can’t stop it! But they don’t put a stop to it for the reason that they don’t half try. Why, Tony Shackleton’s makes the fifteenth on the list! And who knows how many never come

to light! I shouldn't wonder if it were the same fellow, for he works in the self-same way every time. By George, I'd . . ."

"Well," broke in another, "the banks have got several parties under surveillance, and I'm told they've narrowed it down to one man."

"And then again they say," interposed another, "that that's all tommyrot—that they haven't found him, after all."

"I suppose," volunteered a woman, turning to St. John, "you've heard about Mrs. Bradley-Coates, haven't you, Mr. St. John?"

St. John shook his head.

"I rarely read the papers," he told her, with some embarrassment, "and I—I really have heard but little about anything of interest in the city. My time is so taken up that I have little of it to give to the daily news . . ."

"Oh, it wasn't in the newspapers!" interrupted the woman. "They kept it out. It was one night, about a week ago, as Mr. and Mrs. Bradley-Coates were eating dinner in their own house—in their own house, mind you!"—this as though it would have been quite a matter of course had they

been in somebody else's house. "While they were eating dinner, they heard some sort of a noise outside, and, as she looked over her husband's shoulder, there was a man's face staring into the room. She couldn't see the face well," she went on excitedly, "because his coat-collar was turned up, and the lower part was entirely concealed. Anyhow, he disappeared. They called the servants and raised an alarm, and by that time, of course, he had gotten well away. Later, however, they found the ivy vine on the side of the house all torn and broken and the marks of feet around the window. That's all—they never found him, nor . . ."

"And nothing was taken?" spoke up some one incredulously.

The woman smiled; she had been waiting for that inquiry.

"Nothing much," she replied, "only every bit of jewelry that Mrs. Bradley-Coates had in the house—and you know what that means. You know how much she wore! Nobody knows how much they were worth—certainly a fortune in themselves." She stopped suddenly. "Why—why, Ethel, what's the matter?"

"Oh," exclaimed a girl-guest tremulously, her face growing paler every second, "I'm—I'm so frightened! Just as you were talking I looked at the window, and there, outside—there—there—there" She pointed wildly with her hand, and then reeled against her neighbour, and fainted away.

St. John sprang to the window, threw it open, and looked out; there was nothing to be seen; everything was quiet. Then he and two other men stepped outside and investigated; they found nothing in the least suspicious.

In the meantime the servants had ransacked the house from top to bottom, and found no one—even Miss Paget's jewels were intact.

The dinner was resumed, the girl who had fainted concluding with the rest that she had been scared and that the whole thing was the result of her imagination. Order was restored, and the subject of the burglaries dropped.

Only one man had the right of the affair, and his conversation on the corner of the street explained it.

"By George!" exclaimed Burke, for it was he, "I've had a narrow escape! Somebody saw

me lookin' in the window an' pretty near nabbed me! That would have been rich!" He waited a few minutes to determine whether there was any effort at pursuit; presently he went on: "But he's there, all right, all right, an' he won't get away without Jimmy Burke astern! You can bet your bottom dollar on that, Stumpy, to any tune you please."

The Paget function, however, seemed to have been destined to be interrupted. For it was not very long before the butler brought in a note for Mr. St. John; and St. John, taking it and reading it quickly, immediately sought out his hostess to make his excuses, ending with:

"It's half-past eleven, and I must be off at once. Sorry to . . ."

"What—what's the matter?" she inquired anxiously.

"I don't know," he said, with a shake of the head. "I thought that to-night I would be free, but it seems . . . Here's the note; you may read it, if you will."

Dorothy started imperceptibly as she glanced at it; then she read as follows:—

MY DEAR ST. JOHN:—

Be at the Iroquois Club at twelve o'clock if possible. Some friends of yours will be there between twelve and half-past two. Don't fail us.

The note was unsigned. When she had finished reading it, she inquired somewhat uneasily:—

"What does it mean?"

"I don't know," he told her, a mystified look on his face.

"I'm sorry—awfully sorry that you must go," she declared, concealing well the annoyance that she felt.

"So am I, Dorothy. I hate to leave you unprotected. These robberies that they talked about to-night are serious, it seems. You must be careful to keep the house well locked up, for, if anything were to happen to you"—he turned pale as he spoke—"if anything were to happen to you, I don't know what I'd do."

The girl looked up into his eyes with a reassuring smile.

"You need not fear for me, for we are quite safe here. The coachman," she explained, "can be summoned in an instant; and William, our old butler, sleeps downstairs. Then, my aunt sleeps

in the front room and I in one of the back ones—the one at the corner”—she indicated it with a gesture—“and one of the maids is on the same floor within calling distance. Our house is well exposed and we’ve never had any trouble; we never expect to, either. Nothing will—nothing can happen, I’m sure.”

St. John bowed and gravely observed:—

“I sincerely trust not.”

“You will come to-morrow?” she asked as he was leaving.

“Yes,” he replied; and the next moment he was gone.

Dorothy had started to return to her guests when she discovered that she had unwittingly retained possession of the note. She rushed back and threw open the door, even calling after him; but to no purpose; he was already beyond calling distance. She closed the door and stood uncertainly beneath the light and re-read the note, a troubled expression settling upon her face as she did so; and then, instead of returning to her guests, she ran lightly up the stairs to her room.

It was a singular thing that, as long as she had known him, Dorothy had received from St. John

but two letters, and these had come within a fortnight.

Opening the drawer of her dressing-table, she took the letters out, opened them, and compared them carefully with the note which had come for St. John that night. Suddenly, with a little cry, she exclaimed: "What can it all mean—what does it mean?" For she had found that the note of to-night was written in the same hand as were the other two—in the handwriting of Kittredge St. John!

It was, indeed, a very perplexed hostess who returned to her guests some minutes later.

Meanwhile, St. John headed straight for his apartment in the Elberon, which he reached and entered with alacrity; some time later he came out, and directed his steps apparently toward the Iroquois Club, the three men keeping him well in sight in their endeavour to camp upon his trail.

St. John's departure from the Paget house, however, seemed to have acted as a sort of signal for the premature termination of the evening's festivities, for, one by one, the guests began to make ready to go. So that, within half an hour, the lights on the ground floor had been extin-

guished, and Dorothy, seeking at once the privacy of her own room, threw herself into a large chair facing one of the two side windows. She was in no mood to sleep, not only because the night was sultry and close,—for the night was dark and there was no moon,—but because of something that made her wakeful, preyed upon her mind.

“What does it mean? What can it mean?” she repeated to herself over and over again.

Presently she lit a small lamp and placed it upon her dressing-table, and once more she scanned the three letters. There was no further doubt in her mind that they were all in the same handwriting; and mysterious as they were in text—for they contained no hidden word of endearment,—she read and re-read them many times. Finally she swept the letters into a drawer, extinguished the light, and once more sank into her place by the eastern window.

Why was it, she asked herself, that this man, who had thus come into her life, had clothed himself in mystery?

Yet she still had faith in him. But she could not know that outside in the garden at that very moment, concealed by the shrubbery that sur-

rounded the house, there stood a man—a man who was a part of the chaotic blackness of the night, whose skin may have been white, but, if it were, it did not show, for he wore a black mask and dark-coloured gloves, black clothes with coat-collar well turned up—a man who had a keen ear, which he was using to the best advantage as he waited for absolute quiet to reign within the house.

Finally he made an imperceptible movement, and somewhere within his apparel a small bell struck the hour; he sighed with relief.

“I’ll try it now,” he said softly to himself. But still he did not move. “Let me see,” he mused. “I want to get this straight. I must make no mistakes . . . There are six people in the house,” he continued, checking them off on his fingers as he spoke: “The girl, the old lady, the man, and three servants. The three servants are on the upper floor—but they sleep and don’t count—they never do; the man is on the ground floor—that eliminates him; the old lady is in the front room—too far off to be dangerous; that leaves no one but the girl to face—and if she hears me, why, then I can get away in time, at any rate.

The thing seems safe—safer than many others. . . . Here goes!" he ended briefly, moving toward an open space of eighteen feet between the shrubbery and the house, and disappearing from view beneath the bushes, only to emerge an instant later from the protection of the leaves; and now, by means of some clever burglar trick, he wriggled half-prostrate across the open space.

To the woman in the room above, he was merely a passing shadow, a bit darker than the others, perhaps, but nothing more.

Once across, however, the man became to all appearances a portion of the house. He was not one to do things at random, and in this instance he had most carefully acquainted himself with the details of the job before him, to say nothing of his being an expert in this line.

Night after night he had lurked in the vicinity of this house, alert and wide-awake to everything that went on, not only on the outside, but likewise in the inside, alert as well to the habits of its occupants. He had even determined the exact location of his booty, and, if surprised, he knew just which way to run.

Outside a policeman swung along with easy

gait. He stopped and peered a moment into the shrubbery, and then passed on.

The man alongside the house breathed a sigh of relief. Suddenly he shook with uncontrollable but silent laughter.

"I presume," he remarked softly to himself, "that Burke and his gang are still watching for me at the Iroquois. I must go around there and take a look at them when I get through."

Prepared for all emergencies, quickly now he proceeded to force his way through a cellar window; and, having accomplished this, he crept into the house, dropping to the cellar floor, closing and fastening the window behind him. There was no trace of him or his work left without; all that he had now to fear were the occupants of the house.

"This is a cinch!" he muttered underneath his breath.

But it proved to be not so much of a cinch as he had thought: he had to break an entrance through three doors before he stood upon the ground floor. Once there, however, he felt his way cautiously to the pantry—where he knew the butler slept. The door was wide open, and a

gas-jet in the room was turned down low. Loud snores proceeded from the bed; the butler lay upon his back, his mouth wide open. The man with the black mask was pleased to note that much.

It is said that the chloroforming burglar is a myth, or, if not a myth, a failure. Chloroform gags and stifles and is bound to waken its victim. But the man in the black mask knew his business: He was ready for the gasp, the cough, the gurgle, and anticipated the fact that his victim would wake.

Listening carefully to the respiration, he grasped his man by the throat each time there was an expulsion of air, and sprayed the vapour down his throat as he released his grasp. There was a struggle—there was bound to be—but the butler was no match for the iron muscles and trained science of the man in black; and the struggles became fainter and fainter, until the man on the bed succumbed.

For ten minutes the burglar kept his chloroform-cone in place over the other's face, and then deftly gagged him and tied him hand and foot to the bed whereon he lay.

Then he stole softly upstairs.

Every bedroom door was locked—the recent burglaries having made everybody timorous.

“It’s just as well,” he laughed to himself, carefully securing each ~~door~~ from the outside with ropes tied to the handles in such a manner that it would be impossible, by the exercise of ordinary force, to open them at all. Nevertheless, at each door he listened attentively, and, hearing no sound, he crept stealthily to the rear hall window and stepped out upon the extension roof.

A rap upon the flags outside startled him; it was only a roundsman on his rounds; the man on the roof felt perfectly secure, for he was unseen from the street below.

Without a sound, he crept warily across the roof and paused just before he reached the furthest window. He fumbled once more in his waistcoat, and the mysterious little bell tinkled again.

“I must hurry up!” he told himself. “I’m due now at the Club.”

He laughed noiselessly, and then stepped to the open window and raised the mosquito-bar that retarded his entrance, and disappeared within.

Presently Dorothy heard—or thought she heard—a noise in the hall without—the noise of a man creeping stealthily. In an instant she was on her feet and over at the door listening. The steps drew swiftly nearer and swelled out suddenly louder, and, unlocking the door, quickly she threw it open and called out:—

“Who’s there?”

But there was no answer. And then she saw what it was: a light breeze had sprung up, and the curtain of an open window in the hall was rising and falling with the wind. Smiling at her fears, she shut the door, locked it, and once more resumed her seat.

How long she sat there she did not know. It is said that fishermen mesmerise themselves by watching a cork bob up and down upon the sunlit wave, and that the heavy hours pass almost like minutes with them. And so it was with Dorothy sitting in her room in the dead of the night, wide-awake, and yet dreaming day-dreams, oblivious to everything, even herself. Once more she started. What was it that startled her again? She looked hastily around and tried to collect her thoughts.

And then it was that she saw at the northern

window a human hand, carefully, stealthily, noiselessly raising the screen; and, before she could raise an alarm, a man leaped silently, subtly, into the room—a man in a long black coat with a black mask—a man who seemed part and parcel of the night itself. An instant more, and there shot a gleam of light across the blackness of the room—a gleam of light that issued from a lantern in the hand of this silent figure.

Stupidly—for she was too frightened to call and too weak to run—she watched the ray of light play across the bed. Then once more there was darkness, the black figure having moved silently away from her and toward the dressing-table. He had, evidently, thought to find a sleeper on the bed, and now had concluded that the room was empty, for he became less stealthy in his movements.

“This room seems to be unoccupied,” he muttered presently to himself. “That’s strange. I thought . . .”

Now he was moving here and there with a certainty and rapidity that was surprising, never slipping or stumbling and even unfastening, with a click, the mask which concealed his features.

And still the girl did not move, but sat speechless, motionless.

The man once more flashed his light, but this time directly upon the dressing-table. It was evident that he was looking for valuables; and presently he stripped the top of it of everything that lay in plain sight, among which were the jewels that Miss Paget had removed that very night. Now he opened each drawer, and, with his deft fingers, examined the contents, each jewel, as he appropriated it, sparkling in the strong light from his lantern. Every jewel that the girl possessed was in that dressing-table; the burglar made a rich haul.

Dorothy continued to remain motionless, restraining with difficulty an inclination to cry out.

Suddenly the man turned to the chiffonier, and, opening a drawer, his light fell upon three letters lying loose within it—the three letters written in the handwriting of Kittredge St. John. Glancing over the first two carelessly, he laughingly remarked to himself:—

“They were wise precautions.”

He picked up the third; it fell from his hands with a cry.



Stepping quickly to the wall, she turned a button

" . . . fool . . . idiot!" he muttered.

Hastily he picked it up, put it in an inside pocket of his clothes, and then once more he resumed his work. But, as he did so, the light from his lantern shone full into the mirror that stood above the dressing-table, and the reflection shone full into his face.

"Henry!" gasped a faint voice in the gloom.

Quickly the man turned in the direction of the voice, flashed his light upon the girl, starting in surprise as he now saw her for the first time. Instantly recovering himself, however, he said in a well-modulated voice:—

"Keep quiet, will you!"

The girl did not speak for a moment, then cried out again in an agonised voice:—

"Henry! Henry!"

The man took a step towards her, and demanded sternly, but in a low voice:—

"What's the matter?"

The girl by a heroic effort now regained full possession of her faculties; and, stepping quickly to the wall, she turned a button, flooding the room instantly with light.

"I called you," she replied, facing him. "I called you—Kittredge St. John!"

The man gazed at the girl uncertainly; the pupils in his eyes were dilating widely; he looked as a man does who steps from darkness into light.

"My name is not Kittredge St. John," he returned in a nonplussed sort of way; and the girl, looking at his eyes, wondered what there was about them that made them look so peculiar—that made them look as though he had just awakened out of a sleep.

An ordinary observer would have said that he was dazzled by the sudden light; but Dorothy, agitated as she was, decided that the man before her was asleep, fast asleep, was a somnambulist. Yes, that was it; that explained everything. She made a movement towards the door, but he was too quick for her. In an instant he had readjusted his mask to his face and leaped toward the electric light and smashed it, leaving her to grope in the dark.

He made no attempt to touch the girl—though he half-suspected what was in her mind,—but moved stealthily toward the window and proceeded to make his exit.

But no sooner had he placed his foot outside than he just as quickly withdrew it. For there, dimly outlined in the darkness, he saw the head of a uniformed officer peeping carefully above the roof. Once more in the room, and regardless of the presence of the girl, the man hastily stepped to the inner door, unlocked it, and attempted to throw it open; but he was hoist by his own petard: his rope outside was fastened to the knob, and the door would not yield. He swore beneath his breath, and, going to the eastern window, looked out; on the lawn below was another officer standing motionless with something glinting in his hand.

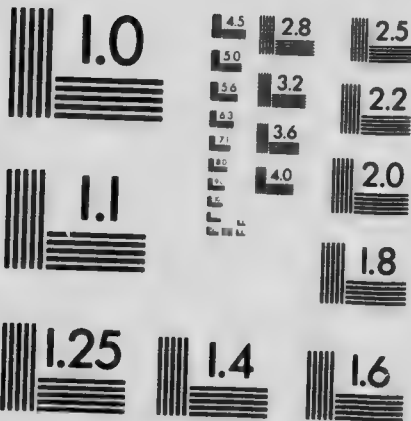
Uncertain as to how to proceed, he halted for a moment to debate with himself; and, finally stepping to the foremost of the eastern windows, he put out his head and let forth a blood-curdling scream—a scream that might have been a woman's, so shrill was it in its intensity.

Immediately the attention of the officer below was attracted to that window. Whereupon the burglar dashed out through the northern window upon the extension roof, brushing aside the officer who was prepared to make an entrance there, and



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leaped and sprang to an arbour at the back and jumped to the ground.

Simultaneously a shot rang out in the air and a voice cried out:—

“Halt!”

The burglar laughed a mocking laugh, and sprang upon the low wall, cleared it, and disappeared. But, as he did so, the officer took aim and fired, his shot being followed by the shriek of a man in agony; but, though the burglar shrieked with pain, he halted for an instant and, turning, fired two shots from a revolver before he sped on his way.

The officer kept on firing until, all of a sudden, he was startled by the faint scream of a woman.

“Don’t—don’t shoot that man!” pleaded the girl in the window. “Don’t shoot him—he’s not himself! He’s not awake! He’s a somnambulist! Don’t shoot . . . !” The voice trailed off into incoherency, and she fell, fainting, to the floor.

Fortunately for the girl, however, the officer was too much bent upon pursuit to hear much of what she said. One of his fellow-officers was al-

ready speeding after the culprit, while the other one remained as custodian of the place.

Presently neighbours came to their relief; the household was thoroughly aroused, only the butler remaining for some time in a stupor.

Meanwhile, away down the street, the burglar made good use of his heels. If he had been asleep, he certainly woke up, for he flew like the wind, dashing up one street and down the next, often doubling on his tracks. Suddenly he dashed around a corner; then everything was still. Up to this time the officers had kept sight of him; but now, when they in turn rushed around the corner, he was lost to them, had completely disappeared. They ransacked the neighbourhood and searched all the houses, but without avail: the marauder had escaped.

By the time they had finished their search, a man, footsore and weary, was walking in security some two miles away on the other side of the town, his steps bent toward the Iroquois Club.

"Good Heavens, how that bullet hurts!" he exclaimed to himself, shaking blood from his finger.

Now, it is well known that oftentimes in battle

men are shot through their limbs, or even through the body, almost without pain. Sometimes they do not even know that they have been hit; on the other hand, a stray bullet may clip a piece of ear or chop off a finger and cause excruciating pain. Such was the case with this man: he had been hit, but the bullet had merely clipped a small piece of flesh from the end of his middle finger; and, while the wound was not serious, it was agonising, and had caused the involuntary shriek of anguish which he had emitted when the shot had taken effect.

Thrusting his injured hand into his pocket, he walked on in the direction of the Iroquois Club.

CHAPTER XVI

A DINNER EXTRAORDINARY

"SHALL I serve dinner, sir?"

The place was the private dining-room of the Iroquois Club. It was a little after twelve o'clock on that same evening, and the question was put to Varnum, as he stood in the midst of a little group of men in evening dress, by a man who looked anything but pleased with his garb of prison stripes. At the moment of being addressed by this strangely-clad servant, Varnum was conversing earnestly with his friends, Olyphant and Major Holbrook. Before answering, he threw a comprehensive glance around the room; noted that four other convict-garbed servants were standing stiffly at attention against the walls; saw that the table was tastefully arranged; then he turned to the pseudo-convict at his elbow.

"No, Gustave," he protested, "of course we can't go on. Our guest of honour has not arrived."

Varnum drew out his watch, furrowed up his brow, and nervously blinked his eyes.

"I say, Major," he called out, "where can St. John be?"

"Don't ask me," returned Holbrook. "I haven't seen him for a week."

"How about you?" queried Varnum of Olyphant.

Olyphant shrugged his shoulders.

"He was all right when I saw him twenty-four hours ago."

Varnum now went over to another guest and drew him into a corner.

"Are you sure, old man, that Kitt St. John was notified of this affair?"

"Sure," returned the other laconically. "The man who did it is a man who'd find him dead or alive."

Archie sighed with vexation.

"We're an hour late already!" he exclaimed. "The point of the whole thing will be lost if St. John don't get here soon."

Archie was quite right: the point of the whole thing, if there were any point to it at all, centered upon St. John. Varnum's midnight dinner—for Archie never gave a dinner until after midnight—was no ordinary dinner. The invitations

had been issued in the shape of warrants served by deputy-sheriffs; the waiters from Gustave down, as has been seen, appeared in durance vile; the menus were highly decorated affairs; the windows of the private dining-room were heavily barred; in fact, everything was suggestive of but one phase of life—crime.

"Can you beat it?" sung out Archie, as he picked up a menu and gave it to the Major to read.

"I should say not," replied the Major, drawing down the corners of his mouth in a grim smile as he gazed upon the cover of the menu. It represented Kittredge St. John in evening dress in the act of breaking into Bonwit's bank; while, on the back, there was a striking likeness of the same gentleman ruefully contemplating the outlines of a nearby penitentiary, in the garb affected by the Club waiters.

As for the bill of fare, it was arranged in such a manner that it featured each alleged feat of St. John's; in other words, there was a crime for every course.

As Varnum and the Major gloated over this exquisite and expensive bit of tomfoolery, a dozen

men, looking somewhat uncomfortable, filed into the room.

"By George!" cried Archie; "I came near forgetting all about them! They're almost as important as St. John himself."

Puzzled, the Major looked them over. Standing before him were twelve gentlemen, each one in a different walk of life, and each one following out his own idea of evening dress.

"Who on earth are these?" queried the Major, catching Archie by the sleeve.

Varnum burst into a fit of almost uncontrollable laughter.

"Why," he spluttered, "don't you recognise them? They're the jury at St. John's trial."

"They're all here—the Judge, the Prosecutor, the Sheriff, and now, here's the jury. Corking idea, isn't it? And all mine, too."

Another half-hour went by and still the guest-of-honour came not. Time and again Gustave, the waiter, his leg hampered with rubber ball and chain, approached Varnum with the statement that the unusual delay was playing havoc with the good things long waiting to be served.

"It can't be helped," the waiter was told. "We've simply got to wait if we—all night, if necessary."

And Gustave, with a deferential "As you say, sir," limped back to his accustomed place.

All this time the jurymen, with hunger written on their faces, were imbibing preliminary cocktails; the other guests grew glum; Archie was beside himself in despair. And now going to the 'phone with the remark that he would call up every place in town until he found St. John, he placed the receiver to his ear and asked Central to give him 346 Chatham. But that is as far as he got; for, at that moment, from every throat in the room, and especially from each well-moistened epiglottis of the twelve jurymen, there rose a rapturous shout that well-nigh rent the ceiling.

"St. John, St. John!" came in chorus.

At first glance he appeared as debonair as usual, but, after a while, it was plain to all that he was unusually distraught. He was pale, had the appearance of a man who had been engaged in some mental struggle; dark circles were under his eyes; the veins stood out upon his forehead, and his lips were pressed together tightly. So

that, as he bowed to all his friends in turn, there was not one that did not experience a sudden shock. It was plainly evident that St. John was not altogether himself.

"Why, what's the matter, old man?" asked Archie Varnum with considerable concern. "You don't look at all fit."

St. John moved slowly with his host to the seat of honour, and, sinking into it, drew his hand wearily across his forehead.

"I'm all right," he said, a trifle breathlessly. "But I'm tired—tired of everything to-night, of everything but you, Archie."

But as the dinner progressed—for Gustave made every effort to keep his viands from falling into the innocuous desuetude with which the delay had threatened them—the burden that rested upon St. John's shoulders seemed to roll away. So much so that presently he lifted his glass high in the air and said:—

"To two good men and true, gentlemen; may you never be less happy than you are to-night."

The maudlin jurymen at the other end of the table were delighted. St. John had always been

popular with men outside as well as inside the Club. However, it could hardly be said that he had ever made a bid for this popularity; on the contrary, there had always been a certain reserve about him; and, lately, even the most conservative had to acknowledge that this habit was growing upon him; that he was holding himself more and more aloof from his best friends. But to-night, when later he rose to reply to the first toast of the evening, there was something about him—something that could be likened to a vital resolve, that lifted him above, even, the extraordinary individual that he was.

"Gentlemen," he began, while the eye of every man, even to the tipsiest of the twelve jurymen, was upon him, "there is something that I have to say to you—the sooner said, the better." He paused; the room became silent as death. "My coming among you evidently seems to have been a mistake," he went on. "I thought I knew what I was about; it seems I did not. In the last six weeks events have happened in this town with bewildering rapidity—events that a few officers of the law believe that I am responsible for. I am here to-night . . ."

He stopped and

closed his eyes, his whole frame quivering. Indeed, to little Archie Varnum, it seemed as though St. John were fighting a tremendous fight against some unknown influence.

"I say to you to-night," he resumed, "that I am responsible, in a measure, for the happenings of those events, but not in a way that is generally supposed. Two months ago . . ." He broke off abruptly and then declared with an air of great hopelessness: "Oh, I can't tell you to-night. You wouldn't understand. . . . But this much I will say—you've all heard used, time and time again, that disagreeable term—a catspaw, and you all know what the term signifies. Not a pleasant thing to contemplate, is it?" He looked around the room comprehensively. "But I . . ."

The ring of the telephone bell interrupted him. Major Holbrook happened to be the nearest to the instrument. Jumping to his feet, he seized the receiver in his hand. In another instant, he was holding up his other hand for silence.

"One moment, St. John!" he cried. "This has got something to do with you!"

Now he spoke into the 'phone.

"Hello, Chief!" He nodded towards the as-

sembled company and added: "It's headquarters, Chief of Police."

Then through the 'phone:—

"Yes, I hear you—you are talking to Major Holbrook. What is it?"

At the other end of the wire the Chief drew a long breath.

"The Paget house has been robbed, and they say by Kittredge St. John."

"Why, that's the girl he's engaged to," said Holbrook.

"Yes, I know it," replied the Chief. "Nevertheless, he robbed it to-night. He was seen by Miss Paget and two of my men."

Major Holbrook's face broke into a smile.

"Well, you didn't make a capture; did you, Chief?" And from his position at the telephone he winked at St. John.

"No," replied the Chief, "not exactly; but we'll get him if Miss Paget will tell the truth."

The Major rang off, and, turning now to the assembled company, he roared out:—

"Archie, your dinner is a joke, but here's another that's got it skinned to death. Here's St. John, who has been here all evening . . ." He

stopped as though searching his memory to confirm the truth of his statement; a juryman nudged his neighbour and whispered:—

“But he hasn’t been here all the evening.”

“He was found,” went on Major Holbrook, “by the police ransacking the house of Miss Paget, uptown. What do you think of that? And, what’s more, they say they’ve cornered him at last!”

At his tone of irony, the diners broke into an uproarious guffaw; but suddenly they stopped, for St. John, raising his hand high in the air, brought it down crashing among the glasses.

“It’s the last straw!” he cried out, glaring wildly about him. “I’m through with talking—now I’m going to act.”

He left his place rapidly and strode down the long table and into the dressing-room; Archie followed him, only to find the door of the dressing-room closed. Pushing it open, he uttered an exclamation of alarm: there in the middle of the room stood Kittredge St. John deliberately contemplating a bulldog revolver which he held within his hand. In a moment Archie was at his side, crying out:—

"Kitt, for Heaven's sake, what are you going to do?"

St. John straightened up and opened his eyes like one coming out of a dream. For a long time he stared at Varum; at last, clutching him by the hand, he said:—

"Thanks, old man, you came just in the nick of time. . . ." And with that, apparently obeying a sudden impulse, he handed the revolver to Varum, adding: "Take this from me, Archie; will you? You'd better keep it for me." But as Archie was about to take it, St. John, obeying another impulse, quickly withdrew it from Archie's grasp. "No," he exclaimed, thrusting the gun into the pocket of his dinner-coat, "I'm a man after all, Varum! There's some way out of this other than . . . It may take days, but there's something that I've got to do, Archie, something . . ."

"What are you going to do?" interrupted Archie quickly.

"I'm going to force the issue," returned the other. "To force the issue with myself and some one else. I've got to leave you now, Archie—good-night."

Outside the Club, and almost to a minute of the time that St. John said these words, a policeman, pacing slowly upon his beat, passed by the place where Burke had determined to take his station, whence he might wait and watch for the quarry that he was intent upon running to earth.

"There's been a burglary uptown," the policeman said. "I just came out with the two-o'clock squad and heard 'em talk about it."

"You don't mean to say . . ."

"Yes. Up in the swell quarter, a family of the name of Paget. . . . Thief got away with a lot of jewelry and . . ."

The special caught the other by the arm and asked excitedly:—

"Paget, did you say?"

"That's the name; at least, so I was told."

"But I was there myself to-night! I can't believe . . . !" And, with these words, Burke proceeded to move on, his eye directed toward the entrance of the Iroquois Club. At that moment, however, he saw a man coming out—a man who stood for an instant under the bright light above the door, and then, descending the steps to

the street, turned to his right and walked along, one hand, carelessly perhaps, concealed in the pocket of his coat.

The man was Kittredge St. John.

The following morning there was a secret session at Police Headquarters, in which the captains of the various precincts, Burke and his associates, and the two officers who had been present at the time of the theft were in attendance. The police department had been roasted right and left by the press and the people, and it was even hinted that certain of the officers were in league with the gang of burglars. It is due to the honesty of the force to say that they were innocent of the slightest information relative to the affair. They had tried their best to solve the mystery; they had tried their best to prevent the depredations, but without success. Burke was their best man, and to him was entrusted the task of running down the thief. He was confident, or had been, that St. John was the guilty party; he had run him down as best he could.

"Gentlemen," said the chief, "the honour and integrity of this force have been attacked, and we

are powerless to defend ourselves until we produce one or more of the members of this gang and yield them up to punishment. Last night's affair is the last straw! I'm going to find out about this thing if it takes a leg, and I'm going to begin right now. I want Andrews and Cassidy to step up here and tell their story."

Andrews and Cassidy in turn rose and told the same tale.

Andrews was the officer on the beat; Cassidy, a roundsman. Their suspicions had been aroused the night before by the merest chance—the sudden lighting of Miss Paget's room. For some minutes they had directed their attention to the place; then their suspicions were confirmed when they saw the man replace his mask, leap toward the light bulb on the wall, and smash it. One of the men immediately moved to the rear of the house, mounted to the extension roof, and was about to enter the window as the burglar, a tall, well-built man, dashed past him and leaped to the ground. They fired and evidently hit their man, because along the line of chase they discovered drops of blood. In their opinion they had wounded him painfully, and perhaps very seriously. And then

he had disappeared. They had done their best—and no man could do more.

"Now, look here," asked the Chief, "did this man look like St. John?"

"Well, sir," said Andrews, "as I said, we didn't see his face. But, to tell the truth, St. John was the man we were looking for—we had an eye out for him—and this man seemed to us to be about his build. We thought, sir, it was St. John."

The chief now called Burke.

"Where were you all this time, Burke?" he questioned.

"Followin' St. John."

"And you found out?"

"Nothin'—just nothin'. Either we're away off, or else St. John's dead on to us and is keepin' straight."

The Chief turned a pair of suspicious eyes upon the detective.

"What the mischief do you mean, Burke?" he demanded. "Don't you know that St. John robbed the Paget house last night?"

Burke started up as though shot.

"What! D'ye mean to tell me that he robbed

the Paget house?" cried Burke. "I can take an oath that he never . . ."

"How do you know that he didn't?" asked the Chief.

"Well," Burke told him with a smile, "I ought to know. I saw him go into the Iroquois Club last night, saw him take his place in the dining-room, saw him sit there all night till half-past two in the morning, saw him go home, an' I've just come from the Elberon, where he lives."

"Do you mean to tell me that you saw St. John himself in the Iroquois Club all that time?"

"To be exact," explained Burke, "I didn't see his face after he went in, but I saw it from his eyebrows up; and, besides, the doorkeeper told me half-a-dozen times that St. John was there. He was there, all right," he wound up glibly.

The Chief glanced uncertainly at the men before him. Presently he touched a button; an official appeared.

"You get a cab," commanded the Chief, "and go up to Miss Paget's house and bring her here. I'm going to have her down; she's the only one who can solve the mystery."

Half an hour later, Miss Paget was announced;

she was subjected to no stage of delay, but was immediately shown into the Chief's private room, where, accompanied by Burke, he saw her.

In a few words, the Chief explained to her why he had sent for her and the importance of her testimony; she replied that she understood, and would render any assistance in her power.

"Did—did you get the man?" she asked, a bit anxiously it seemed.

"No," replied the Chief.

"Yes," answered Burke.

Burke's was the better answer of the two. He was taking no chances even with Miss Paget, and was not so sure that she was not trying to shield the burglar. Burke, seeing the necessity of reconciling the two replies, responded glibly:—

"We've got a man, but not the man—although some of us think he is the man. He's nothing but a tramp," continued Burke, "who had been injured in a row."

Miss Paget breathed a sigh of relief; perhaps, though, it was due to exhaustion.

"Now, Miss Paget," said the Chief, "won't you tell us all you know?"

And Dorothy told him all there was to tell,

from the time the burglar entered her window to the time she saw him disappear in the gloom with Cassidy and Andrews at his heels; but she said nothing about his personal appearance. Burke took quick note of that.

"Just describe the man; will you, please?" he requested.

She described him—said that he was tall, well-built, wore a black coat and a black hat, and in appearance was gentlemanly.

"You saw his face?" inquired Burke carelessly.

Burke wasn't sure that she had seen his face, but he was trying the experiment; she hesitated imperceptibly, and then answered:—

"I did. He wore a mask at first; later he removed it."

"Wasn't the man you saw in your room last night Kittredge St. John?"

"No," was her brief answer, delivered in a tone that carried conviction.

CHAPTER XVII

ROXANE TURNS INFORMER

THERE was a low, timid knock upon the door; Roxane, somewhat startled, turned quickly toward it and demanded sharply:—

“Who’s there?”

“It’s I, madam,” came from Kato, one of her Japanese servants; “I have a letter for you.”

Roxane looked hastily about the room and started for the door; then, thinking better of her action, remained where she was, calling out impatiently:—

“Put it underneath the door—and don’t disturb me any more, please!”

“Very well, madam,” replied the servant, immediately thrusting between the door-sill and the bottom of the door a white square envelope; and Roxane, recognising at a glance that it was from St. John, seized it with avidity and tore it open.

Roxie [she read], one more big master-stroke and then our get-away. You leave town on the 17th and wait for me at the trysting-place on the 21st. Don’t fail! Everything

is arranged. Bring with you everything—we are through with the town of M—.

As ent

KITT.

For an instant the heart of Roxane leaped within her; but the next instant, as was her wont, she began to analyse and suspect his motives, tearing mentally, bit by bit, this missive to pieces.

"I see it all," she said to herself, and all the agony of the past few weeks swept over her once more, sharpening her wits, clearing her vision. "Four days between the 17th and the 21st—just time enough to get out and leave the coast clear to you. Ah, Kitt, you were stupid to make everything so clear to me! I see through your master-stroke only too well. Our get-away!" She laughed. "Your get-away, you mean. No, no," she mentally commented, "there shall be no get-away for you—you've been getting away too much. Dorothy Paget, I'd like to see her. . . . No, Kitt, you've had your last chance!"

She raged a moment inwardly, her eyes blazing, her cheeks aflame. Presently she went on:—

"I am to bring everything. I wonder if he . . ." She broke off suddenly, her startled

glance seeking an etching—an innocent-looking pastoral on the wall. "I shouldn't be surprised to find that he had robbed me," she concluded, darting to the etching; and, swinging it back upon a pair of hinges, revealed a safe in the wall. Hastily she turned the combination and swung open the small steel door and looked within. They were all there; package upon package of yellow-back bills; boxes upon boxes of glittering jewels, and in the midst of all—shining all with its brilliance—lay the matched pearl necklace the pride of the Tony Shackletons.

"I'm to bring all these," she said to herself as she shut the door and restored the etching to its place. "Would he lose all this for me, he mean, after all, to come to me on the

Pondering, the countenance of Lady Paget thrust itself into her vision. She stamped her foot impatiently.

"No, he doesn't want these!" she exclaimed hotly. "He doesn't want me! He wants her—the richest girl in town!" She sneered. "She has necklaces, money, everything! I see it all now! And this is to be my pay—my pay for all that has passed between us!" She paused a mo-

ment, and, with difficulty, controlled the emotion that she felt. "Kitt," she said, "the three years that I spent away were heaven compared with these last few months."

Her mood changed on the instant, and, tearing St. John's letter into bits, she stamped upon the pieces as they filtered to the floor; then she became the subtle, crafty, self-possessed woman that she was meant to be.

She sat down at her little desk and answered his letter with a request for one brief interview before she left, naming the time and place with unusual particularity.

"I think, Mr. St. John," she assured herself as she sealed the note, "that there will be no getting away for you."

In the corner of the room there hung a little cabinet in which Roxane kept her brushes, her colours, and her oils. She now stepped to this cabinet, and from the top shelf took down two small phials and a test-tube. One phial contained, in liquid, a long piece of reddish-brown substance, resembling, more than anything, a section of the small root of a tree; the other phial contained a colourless liquid. And, placing these two phials

upon the desk before her and the test-tube by their side, she seized an indelible pencil and a sheet of soiled ruled writing-paper of the general character sold to school-children, and upon it wrote a message in strange, stilted hand-writing.

"No one but Kitt would ever know that," she murmured to herself, placing it into an envelope, "and he must never know. . . . He shall never know. . . ."

Once more she turned her attention to the phials. With a small pair of nippers she drew forth the piece of tree root from its bottle, placed it on a blotter, and cut from it a section of the size of a small lozenge, returning the remainder of the root swiftly to its liquid, and deposited the lozenge in the bottom of her test-tube; then, seizing the other phial, she poured the test-tube one-quarter full of the colourless liquid. This liquid gave out a peculiarly pungent odour that made her gasp, but she covered the test-tube with her thumb nervously and shook it in the air until the lozenge had completely disappeared—the solid having become dissolved almost immediately in the pungent liquid.

"So far so good," murmured Roxane to her-

self. And, taking the note that she had so carefully indited, she proceeded to her little artist's sink in the corner of the room, laid the note upon a plate, and poured the mixture over it until it was completely saturated; the indelible pencil-writing leaped immediately into a vivid blue; then, seizing the note gingerly by the corner, allowed it to drain for an instant into the sink before inserting it into the envelope that she had prepared, and sealed it.

"Kitt's note," she said to herself, "I can mail; but this other must, somehow, be delivered within an hour."

It was almost midnight when a little street gamin, with a dirty face, darted into police headquarters and shoved a dirty letter under the nose of the desk-sergeant who sat behind the rail.

"Fer youse!" exclaimed the urchin, and, turning, darted out with the same rapidity that he had entered.

The desk-sergeant took the note and started to open it, but suddenly stopped. Some pungent odour had assailed his nostrils. He beckoned to a door-man and said:—

"Tell Burke to come here." And Burke entering, the desk-sergeant went on: "Your name is written on the corner of this envelope, so I guess it's up to you . . ."

Burke took the envelope, tore it open, and drew forth the note within.

"Jerusalem! It's a wet one, all right!"

"So it seemed to me. What's it all about?"

Burke forgot its dampness in the perusal of its contents. His eyes bulged from their sockets.

"Sergeant, it's from the same party that gave us the pointer about the Shackleton affair!" he exclaimed; "and he's putting us wise to another deal!"

"What do you make of it, anyway?" inquired the sergeant dubiously.

"It's my opinion that it's somebody that's mighty close to St. John. . . ."

"But what does it say?" pressed the other.

"Read for yourself."

Whereupon the sergeant read as follows:—

I told you the truth about the Shackleton affair, did I not? If you had not been butter-fingers, you would have captured the man in the act. However, I'm giving you another chance

to get your man—make good. I'm on the inside and know whereof I speak. St. John's next move is to rob Mrs. Bellairs—you know, the party that bought the Olyphant homestead. She has a safe in the top of her house where she keeps her money, jewelry, and other valuables. No matter how he found that out, he knows it, and I know it, too, from him. On the morning of the 10th, at two o'clock, he intends to rob that safe. My advice to you is to look sharp if you would capture your man.

The sergeant turned the mysterious unaddressed and unsigned letter several times over in his hands. In the end, he said:—

“I wish we knew who wrote this.” He started to lay the letter down, and then quickly drew it towards him, with: “What's that line on the bottom there?”

“What is it?” queried Burke.

The desk-sergeant pointed to a line which read: “Don't put this letter in the waste-basket; just drop it on the floor.”

“It's a wonder,” commented the desk-sergeant, “that we weren't told to burn it. What do you suppose that means?”

They had little time to conjecture, for, at that instant, Burke sprang back in amazement, exclaiming:—

"Jumping Jerusalem! What the dickens is that?"

And well might he have exclaimed. The soiled letter had suddenly adopted a peculiar course of conduct. While the desk-sergeant still held it in his hand, it had burst at all points at once into a brilliant flame—a flame that was like a puff, a flash of light. There was no beginning to it, no accounting for it. It was a case, apparently, of spontaneous combustion. The letter was there and was not there; its blackened ashes sifted to the floor.

The desk-sergeant was speechless.

"Well, what do you make of it?" he queried. "And that," turning to the envelope, for the envelope also had begun, though more slowly and less merrily, to surrender itself to flame. "What do you make of it?" he repeated, as he swept the envelope to the floor and stamped out the conflagration with his foot. "No wonder," he continued, "that the writer didn't want us to put it in the waste-basket. We'd have had headquarters in a blaze."

Burke sniffed the air.

"That's a clever piece of work, sergeant. The

whole thing in a nutshell is, nobody else was to know what was told us. Do you know what on how the thing was done?"

The desk-sergeant, mystified, shook his head; Burke sniffed in disgust at the other's ignorance.

"Why, man, it's as easy as rolling off a log!" he exclaimed. "Don't you smell that funny smell?"

"I should say I did," was the answer. "It almost choked me. What is it, anyway?"

"Ether," returned Burke.

"Well, ether won't set anything on fire."

"Of course it won't; but phosphorus will."

"What has phosphorus got to do with this?"

"It's got a good deal to do with this," declared Burke. "There's two things that dissolves phosphorus: one is bisulphide of carbon, which is the rottenest thing to smell that you ever smelt; another is ether, which is nicer, but takes your breath away. And that is what was used in this instance. A piece of phosphorus was dissolved in ether and the mixture poured on this letter. As long as it stayed moist there was nothing doing; but you know as well as I do that as soon as phosphorus exposed to the air it will burst into flame in a

minute; and as soon as this solution dried out, why, the phosphorus got in its work and burnt the darn thing up."

The sergeant stared at him in amazement.

"Sergeant," said Burke, with a wink and at the same time poking him in the ribs, "if ever you want to write love letters that you don't mean, this is a good way to write them."

The sergeant smiled a puzzled smile.

"But how do you come to know about things like this?" he asked.

Burke pondered for an instant.

"Oh, the thing has been done time and time again. But that ain't the point. The point is that we must not forget what was in that letter. You remember what it said, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Repeat it to me."

"The morning of the 10th at two o'clock at Mrs. Bellairs'," repeated the sergeant.

"Exactly," commented Burke; and repeated as he jotted down in his note-book: "The morning of the 10th at two o'clock at Mrs. Bellairs'. And this time," he concluded, "we've got to be on the inside and outside, the top-side and bottom-side of

the house. We've got to land our man for fair."

Hence it was that the morning of the 10th found Burke and his assistants lying in ambush in and about the house of Mrs. Bellairs, having obtained that lady's permission as well as her promise to co-operate with them in running down the thief.

Kittredge St. John obeyed Roxane's command with unusual eagerness. But as he stood under the eaves of "The Ivies," swallowed up by the shadow of the house itself, for the moment a vague uneasiness crept over him: Roxane had always kept a light somewhere in the cupola—a light that beckoned to him from a distance; and there was none there now. Presently, casting aside the annoyance that he felt and with a trick known only to himself, he proceeded to clamber swiftly up a corner of the house, finding foot-hold where apparently there was none, and a moment more and he had reached the roof. He did not look behind him; if he had he would have seen upon the dotted lawn shadows quite as fantastic as his own had been; for, at that instant, fully half-a-dozen figures darted from shrub to shrub,

tree to tree, and silently ranged themselves about the house.

But as for St. John, he was too preoccupied with his own thoughts—thoughts of Roxane, and their future. If, however, he had ever given any thought to Dorothy Paget, he forced himself not to think of her now—now as he lightly clambered up the roof, lightly placed his hand upon the casement, and lightly thrust open the window. All was dark within, and for a moment he remained astride the window-sill.

“Roxane,” he whispered.

There was no response, and, without faltering, he dropped to the floor beneath and closed the window; then, stepping to the wall, he turned a switch, and the room became instantly flooded with light.

“I wonder where . . .” he said, looking about him hastily, and was about to leave the room when it suddenly occurred to him that he had two purposes in being there instead of one: he had something on his person which it was necessary to conceal—some treasure that he must hide.

A moment more and he had drawn forth from his pocket a dozen sparkling gems; and from an-

other pocket a goodly roll of bills. Then he stepped to the rural etching on the wall and threw it back, even as she had done, swiftly turned the combination of the safe, and threw open the steel door.

"What—what has she done with them?" he gasped in astonishment. "Where are the . . ."

He staggered and almost fell back, for where once had reposed the matched pearl necklace of the Tony Shackletons, where countless gems had glittered, where bills had piled themselves up in their bulk, there was now nothing save emptiness; no, not altogether emptiness, for, in the far corner of the safe, there was a small packet of bank-notes containing, perhaps, one thousand dollars. That was all that was left.

"Can she already have gone to Manhattan?" asked St. John of himself. "What does it mean?"

He searched every nook and cranny of the safe with his eyes and with his nimble fingers, and then he grasped the small packet of bills that still remained therein.

"Hands up, St. John!" called a voice.

St. John turned, withdrawing his hand and

the packet of bills from the little safe, and looked into the muzzles of half-a-dozen pistols, looked into the unflinching eyes of Burke, plain-clothes man about town.

"Hands up!" called out Burke again, "and keep that money in your hand!"

St. John obeyed, and, for a moment that seemed minutes, he and the detective glared into each other's eyes, one with triumph, the other with defiance.

"I've got you, Mr. St. John!" said Burke at length.

A grim smile played about the lips of St. John, and he quietly answered:—

"Don't be too sure . . ."

"Open that door and quietly call the missus," commanded Burke, nodding to one of his men; and, the next instant, Roxane, pale, wide-eyed, but still self-possessed, entered the room.

"We caught the burglar red-handed, Mrs. Belairs," said Burke, never once removing his gun from its threatening position, "and here he is."

Roxane started back with well-feigned surprise.

"Why, Mr. St. John! It can't be possible . . ."

"Can't be possible!" repeated Burke. "You

see that packet of bills in his right hand there? Well, weren't they in your safe?"

"Yes," she faltered; "over a thousand dollars. What does it mean?"

"It means, Mrs. Bellairs," continued Burke, "that we've got him for grand larceny, that we've got him for burglary, this time, got him good and fast. I simply wanted you to see, wanted someone to see that Burke was right."

"I see," she gasped; "but I can hardly believe it. It seems like a dream, a nightmare. Can it be possible, Mr. St. John, that you have been committing all these crimes?"

St. John merely smiled.

"Do you expect me to commit myself?" he asked.

Burke strode upon him threateningly and placed the bulldog revolver against St. John's breast.

"I guess you will commit yourself, Mr. St. John," said Burke, "and you'll commit yourself right now." He turned to Mrs. Bellairs and added: "If you don't mind, I and my men would like to be left alone. We're going to get a confession from Mr. St. John, and we're going to get it now."

Roxane swept toward the door, where she stood for an instant, her glance travelling from the empty safe to the eyes of St. John.

"I think," she said icily, "that it's about time Mr. St. John did confess. I wish you all success, officer, I'm sure."

When Roxane had left the room, St. John, obeying Burke's command to sit down, quietly asked:—

"What are you going to do with me, officer?"

Burke, all the brute force in his face struggling to the fore, bent over him and said:—

"St. John, I'm going to put you through the mill—through the third degree."

St. John, his eyes flashing, rose to his feet.

"You've no right to do that. Moreover, such proceedings are an insult to our law."

Burke tossed his head.

"Right or no right, we're going to ma' you confess."

St. John thought for a moment. About him were clustered seven brawny, burly men, men without pity, men whose faces already had become the faces of beasts, whose professional muscles were tightening, whose fingers itched as though to get

at his throat. He made a movement as though to get at his breast-pocket; Burke stopped him in an instant.

"Hands up!" he cried. "What are you reaching for?"

The prisoner frowned.

"Perhaps you'd better search me to make sure," he answered. "I was hunting merely for a piece of paper."

They searched him and found that he spoke the truth. What he had sought was nothing save some half-dozen blank sheets of paper in his pocket, and these he now drew forth with their consent and help, and laid them on the table.

"The third degree," he mused softly to himself; then with all the fight gone out of him, apparently, he looked up into the face of Burke and demanded:—

"What do you want to know?"

"Everything," the other told him.

"Don't disturb me, then, and I'll write it down." And for twenty minutes he wrote swiftly, steadily. With a long sigh, he passed over the closely-written sheets to Burke.

Burke took them and read them, his smile growing wider as he read, his face twitching with triumph, his soul gloating over his victory.

"Well, I'll be hanged if he hasn't given in to everythin'!" exclaimed Burke; "everythin' from the robbing of the Mordaunt Bank down to his work here—the whole thing, word for word!" And, stepping to Mrs. Bellairs' desk, he seized an envelope, folded up the signed confession, thrust it into the envelope and into his breast-pocket. "This goes on file to-morrow, boys," he said, tapping his breast significantly; and, turning to St. John, he added: "Now you come with me—I've got you where you can't get away."

Burke was as good as his word. He took St. John with him, and that very night St. John was held for examination—which, indeed, he declined to waive—in a very considerable amount of bail, which, to give him his due, was at once furnished by his friends.

The next morning, Burke, with victory painted all over him, stepped into the District-Attorney's office.

"Prosecutor," he said, "you don't believe it, do you?"

The District-Attorney lighted a cigar before answering:—

“Burke, I can’t believe it. It’s my private opinion that St. John had some kind of a love affair on with our friend Mrs. Bellairs that nobody knew about, and I think, when you caught him, he let you take him as a burglar in order to shield her. What else could he do? Mrs. Bellairs is young, handsome, gay, and those widows, you know, wouldn’t stop at . . .”

Burke brushed aside his remarks with a wave of the hand.

“You’ll change your tune, Prosecutor,” he said, “when I show you his confession. It’s the greatest confession I ever read—clears up every mystery, and it clears it up from the inside. When you’ve finished reading it, you’ll know that the man who tells the story is the man who did the work. No outsider could have told what this man tells. You see . . .”

He tossed over the sealed envelope to the District-Attorney, who tore the envelope open and pulled out a dozen sheets of paper, opened them leisurely, still puffing lazily on his cigar. Sud-

denly he glanced from the sheets within his hand toward Burke.

"What's this, Burke?"

Burke looked upon the sheets and rose in dazed surprise.

"What the devil does it mean?" he asked.

"That's what I want to know," returned the other. "Every sheet is blank."

It was quite true; the paper was unsullied by the touch of ink; there was no mark of any kind upon it. The District-Attorney, with amusement, watched Burke's crestfallen countenance.

"Burke," he said, "there's a champagne supper coming to me."

Burke clutched his arm feverishly.

"Don't let the boys know of this—it's one on me for fair."

He scrutinised the blank sheets again, and then he suddenly pounded them with his clenched hand.

"I know," he exclaimed at length, "I've heard of this before! The paper is doctored; it bleaches ink in a few hours after it is written on, and leaves no trace. It's a slick trick, Prosecutor, but"—he smote the air in his impotent rage—"but, don't you fear; there are two things as sure as death

and taxes: one is that you get your champagne supper; and the other is that I've got St. John! Confession or no confession, I saw him rob this safe—half a dozen of the force saw him rob this safe. I've got him, Prosecutor, got him where he can't get away! "

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DISCLOSURE

THE vigour with which the authorities were prosecuting, if not persecuting, St. John, not only puzzled the newspapers, but greatly increased public sentiment in his favour. There had been some question raised as to the advisability of releasing him on bail. In the end, however, St. John was held in twenty thousand dollars bail—the Sheriff's real-estate partner and right-hand man signing the bond of the accused. Nevertheless, as far as liberty went, St. John, to all intents and purposes, might as well have been a prisoner, for every officer and plain-clothes man were furnished with a warrant or two for his arrest—each one issued for some one of the robberies that had been committed—if he made the slightest attempt to leave town; while as for Burke, for the first time in his campaign against St. John, he could account for every movement that the latter made.

During the two days that preceded his exami-

nation, St. John busied himself with his personal affairs. He had examined all his papers and destroyed everything except the most important; he had quietly called upon each tradesman with whom he traded and paid his bill; and finally, drawing checks on various banks, he closed his accounts with them.

The courtroom was crowded on the day set for his hearing; not a few of the fashionable world in which the accused moved being present. But hardly had the magistrate begun his examination when there was a stir in the back of the room: a tall, blond young man, who had been standing at the entrance, was seen to be forcing his way through the crowd and up the centre aisle in an effort to get to the prisoner. And no sooner did he engage in a whispered conversation with the prisoner than every eye was turned upon them. The people gasped with astonishment. There, in front of the magistrate and facing the crowd, were two men like as two peas—two Kittredge St. Johns!

It took the District-Attorney some time to recover from his surprise. At last he called out in a loud voice:—

"Is Roger Sturgis in court?"

Without any hesitation, one of the two men still engaged in the whispered conversation stepped forward.

"Take the witness chair," commanded the District-Attorney in a voice that still showed his astonishment. Roger Sturgis, he it said, was unknown to him, but he had received from him the day before a bulky letter which he considered of grave importance in this case.

The other of the two men appeared amazed at this new phase of the proceedings. With great difficulty, he found his voice:—

"Your Honour . . ."

The Court silenced him with a severe gesture.

The District-Attorney now addressed the witness on the stand.

"Mr. Sturgis, tell us, please, all you know about the defendant in this case."

"May I tell it in my own way?" inquired the witness. "It's a long story, sir."

And receiving permission to proceed, the witness began to tell how he had been educated at one of the leading universities—to be exact, at Yale—

where his life had been unusually wild, with the result that he had come out of college with no especial training for anything. He had knocked about throughout the East and the West—mostly the West—hoping always for the inevitable something that would suit him to turn up. After some years of this, one day the news came of his father's failure in business—his father, who had kept him supplied with funds; and shortly after that his father had died, leaving him stranded on the high seas of adversity.

"But one day," he went on, "unutterable good fortune fell upon me like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky! I picked up in the street, one morning, this copy of a newspaper."

He handed the paper to the District-Attorney; it was marked in evidence, over the strenuous objections of the defendant's counsel.

The District-Attorney read it aloud to the Court; it ran as follows:

IMPORTANT TO ACTORS AND OTHERS:—Actor, producing play with dual rôle, wants double; must be about 5 feet 11 inches tall, broad-shouldered, siender, blond with naturally strong beard. Must be refined and educated—this is important. Salary large; light work. Apply at once.

X 13, THIS OFFICE.

Eagerly leaning forward in the direction of the magistrate, and in a low, clear, musical voice, no one in the courtroom seeming to be more at ease than he, the witness continued:—

“The story, your Honour, that I am about to tell is so strange that, under ordinary circumstances, I could hardly expect you to believe it; but, in my own appearance and in the papers that I am able to produce, I have the absolute proof of what I say. I tell you frankly, therefore, that through no fault of my own—except, perhaps, some stupidity on my part—my share in this affair is rather a foolish one. On the other hand, if the public has been fooled by this man, so have I, and to a far greater extent. Moreover, I am perfectly innocent of any complicity in the series of crimes that have been perpetrated by him, notwithstanding that, if he could not have used me, he would not have been able to commit them.

“When I met this man,” continued the witness in lowered voice, “I was starving, literally starving—I who had been reared in luxury and who had never known what it was to have a wish ungratified! And a man who is starving will commit any crime almost to get food—take my word for it!

Fortunately, however, for my peace of mind, I didn't have to commit any crime."

"You lie!" exclaimed the prisoner, leaping to his feet; a court officer seized him and forced him back, but he would not down.

"That man is lying to you!" he cried out, pointing to the witness. "He's a perjurer, your honour! He's . . ."

The court officer again silenced him.

"I must be heard," continued the prisoner wildly, desperately.

The Court stood up behind his bench, and, raising his gavel high in the air, brought it down heavily upon the marble slab.

"Silence, sir!" he roared again. "You have your counsel—he will speak when the time comes. Unless you stop, I'll commit you for contempt."

Now few persons—save those accustomed to scenes in courts of law—are familiar with the really terrifying effect that a severe judge may produce with the aid of a wooden mallet. Even old and experienced counsel sometimes cower before an irate jurist; and that the prisoner felt this fear was quite apparent. Contempt of court is a serious matter, as all know, and it seemed likely

that the prisoner dreaded a commitment on that score. That he, apparently, had something to say, was undeniable; whether it was for effect or not, is another matter. He had made strenuous efforts to be heard, but he had subsided for the instant. Some thought that, in case of his acquittal, he did not care to risk the chance of a commitment which would keep him in town just so much longer. The Court, however, kept his eye on him to discountenance any further outbreak.

"To go back to the advertisement," resumed the witness, disregarding the outburst of the prisoner, "in response to my letter I received a note, signed H. Harrison, requesting me to call at 83 ½ Warren Street, this city. When I arrived there I found a number of light-complexioned men preceding me; and, like the others, I took a seat to await the outcome. It did not take Harrison long, however, to weed out the crowd. He narrowed it down to three, and I, of course, being one of the three, was retained. The other two seemed to be as refined and educated as I, and, likewise, as shabby. Presently, we were shown a photograph of a man with a blond, Vandyke beard"—here he paused and looked at the prisoner, the crowd

following his action—"and we were asked if we could grow beards like that. We thought we could. Then he gave each of us twenty-five dollars, and ordered us to report to him as soon as our beards were grown.

"I need not assure you that, when I left that man's presence, I had been lifted to the seventh heaven. That twenty-five dollars meant comparative prosperity; it was my salvation."

He paused a moment, and, with a long sigh, continued:—

"Then, one day, some weeks later, we all reported, by pre-arrangement, to this man Harrison. One swift glance, however, evidently decided him in my favour; for immediately he proceeded to dismiss the other two, giving each of them twenty-five dollars more for their trouble. And now, opening a door that led into another room, he motioned to me to enter, which I did; and, closing the door behind me, Harrison disappeared. That was the last I ever saw of him or ever expect to see of him. I thought, and have always thought, that he was a perfectly respectable man, who was engaged in the transaction of what he believed to be legitimate business.

"Passing into the room into which I had been shown, was another man—a man seated at a table; and, as he rose and held out his hand in greeting, he seemed startled at my appearance; on the other hand, I certainly was at his—the likeness was so striking."

The witness paused and glanced from the prisoner to the crowd; the courtroom, for the moment, being so still that one could have heard a pin drop; then he resumed his narrative.

"This man at the table began by telling me that he was well known in society and in the town, and that great demands were constantly being made upon his time; that he took a certain pride in keeping all his social engagements, and all that sort of thing, but that there were many more congenial ways, to his thinking, in which he could devote himself. In other words, that, being a sort of bohemian, he liked a considerable amount of gaiety and pleasures not to be found within the circle of his friends. This, he explained, had given him the idea of employing some gentleman of refinement to take his place in society, thus leaving him to enjoy himself in the way he liked best. He wound up by asking if I were willing to undertake,

what he termed a mere harmless deception, at the same time assuring me that he had no entangling alliances, and that the result could not possibly involve any embarrassment to me."

The prisoner again sprang from his chair, where he had been sitting continuously in the same extraordinary state of excitement, exclaiming:—

"Your Honour, I must be heard! This man . . ."

"Silence!" roared the Judge. The prisoner fell back.

"Well," continued the witness, with greater ease and freedom as he progressed, "it was such an unusual proposition that, at first, it staggered me. I thought it over for a long time before accepting; but two things finally decided me: one was my love of adventure and of harmless, practical jokes,—I'm through with them now,—and the other was my desperate strait. In the end, I accepted his proposition; and then it was that he told me his name. Whatever hesitancy I had had before, instantly disappeared, for I knew the man by reputation. That, gentlemen, was my first acquaintance with the prisoner there—H. Kittredge St. John!" he

declared, inclining his head once more in the direction of the defendant.

"Your Honour!" pleaded the prisoner, "I beg of you . . ."

"Officers, keep the man quiet; hold him down, if necessary!" shouted the Court.

Two officers stepped to the back of the prisoner's chair and there took their station, each with a hand upon his shoulder; and, although the prisoner seemed divided between a desire to have his say at all odds, and the fear of some unknown and undesirable punishment that might follow, nevertheless he yielded.

Although he did not know it, the Court's admonitions were of small importance; the magistrate could not have committed him for contempt until after the hearing, and the prisoner's demeanour could not have affected his own rights in this particular proceeding; but, nevertheless, a wholesome air of authority was still upon him.

The witness calmly waited until the prisoner had subsided; presently he said:—

"By pre-arrangement I called on him many times—a dozen, perhaps—before I began to serve

him; and always he emphasised the fact that he was eccentric and had a good many ideas which he wished me to follow out, but which, he admitted, might seem to me extremely ridiculous. For instance, he told me that he was invariably reserved—never discussed any of his private affairs with his friends and acquaintances, as many men did, and that he preferred never to be the subject of conversation; that, whenever and wherever I might represent him, I was never to enter into the slightest conversation regarding personalities. This seemed reasonable enough, I thought, but the request that followed it was indeed most unusual: he made me promise, that while I was associated with him in any way, that I would never read the daily papers, or never discuss the daily news, giving for reason that, in a fit of anger, he had sworn to give up the daily press; that he had had some violent quarrel, or some kind of an experience, which he would not discuss; also, he told me that his antipathy to newspapers was well-known to his friends, and that, although they laughed at it, they respected it; and concluded by saying that the newspapers were the most monumental liars, and that they could make

or unmake a reputation in an hour. In short, he became so explosively violent and abusive upon the subject of the press that I assumed at once that he had some very good reason for it. Beside, his request did not then seem so strange to me, for I had known a man who would not use the telephone; another who would not ride on the railroad; and, again, others who had taken violent dislikes to the simplest things. So I promised him—it didn't make much difference to me at that time—to follow his instructions, to be like him in every particular, and began to make the necessary preparations, at his expense, to take my place in society.

"Of course, I lived in ease and luxury, with a suite of rooms all to myself—although he had rooms there which occasionally he occupied. Where he lived when he was not there I really never knew; I never inquired; I don't know now. His method was more or less like this: whenever he desired me to attend a function in his stead, he handed me a brief note of the people I should meet; they were generally the same people; and I soon became well acquainted with them. In fact, with many of them I became better acquainted

than did St. John himself. Moreover, there are certain persons in this town—I know of one or two in particular—who knew me as Kittredge St. John, and, yet, who never had met St. John at all. Furthermore, St. John directed me to make as many new acquaintances as I could, insisting only that I keep him informed as to their names and whether my relations with them were cordial or only formal. His special instructions—always written, and generally mailed to me—were minute in detail, stating merely when and where to go, and what to say, and what to do. It seemed to me to be more trouble for St. John to arrange all this mild deception than it would have been for him to go himself. But that was his affair. Beside, I soon learned that everybody understood and humoured his harmless eccentricities, attributing them more to his bringing up rather than to anything which he himself felt—for he was generally considered to be a good fellow.

“That I was honest with him, I need not assure you; I was, indeed, grateful; and, after all, he was my benefactor—one that was peculiar and whimsical, it is true, but still a man who had befriended me under very trying circumstances. Be-

side, it brought me in touch with the sort of people I had been accustomed to associating with, and I was enjoying myself."

The witness paused, and, with a sweeping glance, took in the entire courtroom. There was one person there, however, who, at the commencement of the hearing, had been priding herself upon the fact that she alone was responsible for this criminal investigation now under way; and, as she looked about her, bowing to her intimate friends, it had been with a tingling satisfaction in the punishment that she was meting out to Kittredge St. John. The woman scorned had scored. But now, in a flash, everything—with her—was changed. The instant that the two men faced the Court, that instant everything became tremendously clear to her; and she saw, at once, the thing that was only beginning to make itself understood to the bewildered spectators. A tremendous wave of remorse swept over her. She realised now that there had been no ground for jealousy; that Kittredge St. John had followed out, in his own great way, a scheme that he had not dared to confide, even to her.

"Kitt, Kitt," she moaned over and over again;

"and I have done all this! What is going to be the result?"

Well might she have asked herself this question—she, the woman who had led him on! The terrible regret that swept over her stunned her senses for a moment, but only for a moment, for again the real Roxane began to assert herself. It was her part now to undo what she had done, and she was going to do it. But how? Her brain was working fast as she intently listened to every word the witness uttered.

"Fortunately for me," went on the witness, "I have kept these written instructions that he gave me. There are a great many of them; here they are."

He passed them down to the District-Attorney, who offered them in evidence; they were admitted and read to the Court.

"So, you see," he continued easily, "there were two Kittredge St. Johns—two that never were seen together, or by the same people; they kept apart. It was not, however, until the night of the Varnum dinner, regarding which you are all familiar, that I even suspected that the man was other than he had represented himself to be. This may seem

rather strange; nevertheless, it is a fact that no one spoke—save casually—to me about these crimes—I, who was supposed to be Kittredge St. John. Of course, something of the former trial here did reach my ears, but, as all I heard was accompanied with boisterous laughter and had all the earmarks of a respectable and well-understood joke, I paid absolutely no attention to it.

“Then, one night—the night of the Paget robbery—my eyes were at last fully opened. St. John had asked me to attend the Varnum dinner; I had made up my mind not to do so. I sought St. John and told him that he had done me a signal wrong, had ruined me, and that I must expose him. He was in a state of dreadful agitation, which I know he assumed for the purpose. He begged me to attend the dinner, promising that he would make a clean breast of the matter, and that he would leave town and never bother anybody again. Incidentally, he reminded me that he had befriended me, and that it wouldn't be just the thing to give him up just then. He also said that all he wanted was twelve hours to complete his arrangements; that things were not as bad as they looked. My

position, to say the least, was peculiar. I knew nothing personally about the man—only what I surmised. I went to the dinner reluctantly, hoping there would be some way out of the situation other than giving him up.

“Gentlemen, you know what happened! It was I who sat in the poker game on the night of the Mordaunt Bank robbery! It was I who was the guest-of-honour at the freak dinner on the night when the Paget home was robbed! Kittredge St. John, the man sitting there, was the man who committed each crime, and all the others that have been so much deplored—Kittredge St. John, who, upon each occasion, by my instrumentality but without my knowledge, was always amply able to prove an alibi.”

He stopped abruptly, as though to lend dramatic emphasis to his last words. He was eminently successful in this, for the courtroom buzzed with excited voices.

But there was one person only in the whole courtroom who understood thoroughly the tremendous situation that existed—an all-important fact, wholly unsuspected, which was to become known within a very few minutes,—and that one person

was Roxane Bellairs, who, though desperate up to this point, now felt her vision clear.

"Kitt, *I* ought to get you clear," she thought to herself, "but *you're* going to do it as you do every big thing—alone." And no sooner had the realisation forced itself upon her than she rose, and, with as little commotion as possible, left the courtroom.

"I certainly can help—I will help. . . ." she murmured to herself as she went.

"I have come here," wound up the witness, after a pause, "to make what reparation I can for my innocent share in these crimes, by revealing to you the exact state of affairs as it exists. This, gentlemen, is my story." And, pointing to the prisoner, he added: "It is also his."

The prisoner sat spellbound, looking at the witness with a fascinated gaze, in which desperation, wonder, admiration struggled for supremacy.

The witness waited for the cross-examination, but there was none. He then stood up and quietly asked:—

"And now that I have told the truth about this thing, is there any reason why I should not go?"

Your Honour has my address, where I may be found any time I am wanted."

The Court looked at both counsel; then he nodded his head, saying:—

"You may go. If you're needed later, we'll send for you."

The witness stepped down from the stand, the crowd making way for him as he walked slowly down the centre aisle, and left the courtroom.

CHAPTER XIX

WHAT FOLLOWED

"Do you desire to proceed with the defence?" queried the Court.

Now the counsel for the prisoner had been ruminating considerably during the testimony of the last witness, and, in spite of the startling nature of the evidence, he was pretty well prepared to proceed. For of one thing he was certain: and that was, that the resemblance between the two men which had deceived many people before would constitute a strong argument with the magistrate in the defendant's favour. For was it not just as likely that the witness, Roger Sturgis, had robbed the bank as it was that the prisoner had done so? And, from the prisoner's demeanour, he wondered if he, too, had not hit upon this line of argument. He had a dim recollection of the capital that had been made out of the resemblance of Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton in the "Tale of Two Cities," and he proposed to take a similar advantage here. Of course, he had had no expressed

inkling of this from his client, and he had been unable to prepare himself for it. Moreover, his client's demeanour had changed from the instant that the other man had appeared: he had kept his eyes fixed upon the witness and the Court, ignoring his counsel, even going so far as not to confide to counsel what it was that he wished to say. But, withal, he was certain that he could trust him, without further preparation, on the stand; in addition, he had evidence upon which he felt he could absolutely rely. The situation was not as bad as it might seem to be.

He touched the prisoner on the arm.

"Take the stand," he said.

The prisoner looked at him, but did not move.

"You heard your counsel," said the Court, with some asperity. "Take the witness stand."

The man obeyed and was immediately sworn.

"Mr. St. John," said his counsel, "will you tell us . . ."

"Wait a minute," broke in the man on the witness stand. "You have made a mistake. My name is not St. John."

"What!" exclaimed his counsel, unprepared for this.

"What!" repeated the Court. "Do you mean to say that the name St. John is an alias?"

"I mean," replied the man in a loud, firm voice, looking the magistrate squarely in the face, "that my name is not St. John; that I am not the prisoner; that . . ."

"What's that, what's that!" cried the District-Attorney; "not the prisoner? What do you mean, sir?"

". . . just what I say. *H. Kittredge St. John is the man who has just left the witness stand—the courtroom.* Time and time again, sir, I tried to tell you that the man who took the stand was the prisoner himself; but you wouldn't hear me. It is not my fault if you did not know that he was the real prisoner, the . . ." He broke off abruptly, and then went on: "He knew that I was coming here to take the stand against him, so he took the stand in my place, and told the story that *I* should have told. He knew it as well as I did, and he could tell it better."

"I don't believe you," said the District-Attorney. "Your Honour, this is a mere ruse . . ."

The witness again interrupted with:—

“Your observation, sir, must be at fault. I know the voice of Kittredge St. John; is it mine? The one thing that St. John did not say to you was that the very points of difference between us were in the voice and in the colour of the face. His face is more or less florid; mine is always pale.”

“By George!” cried out the sheriff in an audible voice to the crowd about him; “that counts for . . .”

The Court adjusted his spectacles and looked at the man long and earnestly. In the end he leaned back in his chair with an air of conviction and announced:—

“This man is not Kittredge St. John.”

The Prosecutor thought for a moment before asking:—

“Why, then, did you not take the stand when I called your name?”

“But you didn’t call my name,” returned the prisoner.

“I did call your name,” said the District Attorney testily.

“You called Roger Sturgis,” responded

prisoner quietly. "My name is not Roger Sturgis."

"Do you mean to imply that you did not write this letter to me—this letter signed Roger Sturgis? Look at it!"

"If you care to find out," explained the prisoner slowly, "you are certain to discover that that letter was written by Kittredge St. John. Ask the bank man there, and . . ." He broke off sharply and concluded with: "It's my opinion, sir, that you will have to look a long way before you find any one answering to the name of Roger Sturgis."

"But these exhibits?" went on the lawyer. "How did the man come to have charge of them?"

"That's simple enough," returned the other. "He had a copy of the newspaper the same as I did, and it was an every-day job for a man like St. John to prepare copies of letters from memory that he had had handed to me in the past. Here are my proofs—look at . . . a . . . other batch of papers in . . . district Attorney. "St. John is a . . . lawyer, and he knew what I was here for, knew that the man

that had the first say would win out. It was a simple thing for him to get off the stand and walk out in the open air a free man from henceforth, for, mark my words, gentlemen, you w'll never find Kittredge St. John! "

And they never did find him.

Outside on the street the idlers had seen a man leap into a long, low racer that stood throbbing at the curb—a racer in which sat a woman at the wheel,—had heard the squeal of the horn, had seen the woman spasmodically throw in the clutch, and the car suddenly leap into life. And then, like a flash, man, woman, and car disappeared.

As the racer ate up the long miles like fire, a flush of shame crossed Roxane's countenance—shame at her tremendous mistake, but it gave her, too, a different kind of emotion, for, suddenly leaning forward, she whispered excitedly:—

" Kitt, a life of joy lies on ahead. Faster—faster—on! "

CHAPTER XX

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

WHAT Roxane Bellairs' little coterie of friends regretted most, in talking over her connection with the affair, was their fragmentary knowledge of it. In vain they speculated, surmised, and guessed possible solutions of their problem; it always ended with a consciousness of the futility of their efforts. One thing seemed certain: they would never get to the bottom of it all.

But in that conclusion, strangely enough, they were in error. The following morning there came to three of her admirers—Major Holbrook, Jerome Olyphant, and Archie Varnum—a short, delicately perfumed note, requesting their presence at "The Ivies." It read to this effect:

There was a time when, on the security of my bonds, you loaned me money. To-morrow morning at eleven o'clock, at my home, I shall be glad to cancel my obligation.

To a fourth admirer—Philander Bonwit—she wrote a similarly delicately perfumed note, some-

what shorter, though quite as much to the purpose: "The portrait, my good friend, is finished."

And so it happened that on that morning four genial gentlemen of the town of M—— separately made their way up the long hill that led to "The Ivies,"—Mrs. Bellairs' villa,—three of the four carrying papers and packages of bonds which had not been disturbed since the deft fingers of Roxane had tied them up.

It was with a smile of unusual proportion that Mr. Bonwit reached Roxane's studio in the cupola, where the butler informed him that his mistress was to be found. But the smile of triumph on Mr. Bonwit's face changed abruptly into an expression of anxiety when he entered the room and found, to his dismay, his three friends there before him—the three men holding their sides and roaring with laughter. Before them was a finished portrait, but not the portrait that Mr. Bonwit had expected to see; not that that he had seen begun with his own eyes, and that he had posed for; but a portrait, chiefly of Mr. Bonwit's back, with the safe as a background, before which he had been photographed by his erstwhile fiancée.

The round and shiny handle of the combination-lock the artist had sketched with wonderful skill into a good-sized mirror, into which the Bonwit in the picture gazed soulfully upon himself, carefully adjusting his tie with one hand and arranging his scanty locks with the other. It was Mr. Bonwit's back to the life; it crystallised his vanity in concrete form.

For some moments, while his friends pointed at him and the portrait with derisive laughter, Mr. Bonwit grew hot and cold by turns. When he could trust himself to speak, he grasped Major Holbrook by the arm and pointed meaningly toward the background of the picture.

"Major," he gasped, "doesn't this look like the picture that was used to rob our safe! Who—why . . ."

In an instant the men sobered. Instinctively they knew that Mr. Bonwit was right: before them was the duplicate—save for the exaggerated combination handle and the puffy figure of Mr. Bonwit—of the pseudo-safe behind which Kittredge St. John had worked with such ease in the Manufacturers' National Bank.

"What does it mean?" spoke up Archie Var-

num, exchanging glances of wonderment with the others.

"We'll ask her," returned Olyphant.

"But where is she—why doesn't she come?" asked the Major uneasily.

Acting on some inward note of warning, Major Holbrook drew forth the letter that had summoned him to Mrs. Bellairs' house that morning; Varnum and Olyphant followed suit, while Mr. Bonwit mentally conned the single message relating to the finished condition of the portrait.

Presently a footman entered the room. Quickly turning to him, the Major asked:—

"Did your mistress leave any word when she would return?"

"Nothing, except to tell you that you should make yourselves at home."

And, having dismissed the servant, they proceeded to discuss the situation. At length Archie Varnum declared:—

"It's all a puzzle to me. Here she puts up these good bonds, borrows less than their face value, and then, apparently, runs away. I'd rather have the bonds than what I loaned her on them."

"Would you, Archie?" inquired Major Hol-

brook, a new note in his tone that made the other men sit up.

Without another word, Varnum proceeded to unwrap his little packet and, exhibiting the top one, he asked excitedly:—

“What’s the matter with this?” And then, before they could answer, he began to thumb the packet, but, to their wondering gaze, drew forth the worthless bonds that filled in between the top and the bottom one.

“Thunderation!” exclaimed Archie. “If she hasn’t . . .” He stopped short, his eyes eagerly following Major Holbrook’s examination of his securities, only to bring forth similar worthless paper.

“Jumpin’ Jerusalem!” yelled out Archie. “Are you stung, too? Joy! Joy! Joy!”

Major Holbrook turned pale and angry.

“I don’t see where the joy comes in,” he retorted swiftly. And, turning to Bonwit, he added: “Bonwit, your fiancée is far too clever for a man like you.”

“I should think she was,” muttered Bonwit, growing red in the face as he spoke. “But there’s one thing I can say that you chaps can’t—I

didn't *loan* any money on bonds. It's a darn shame . . ."

A suspicious moisture gathered in Mr. Bonwit's eyes. Turning his back upon his three cronies, he stepped into the farther corner of the room, where he regained his composure sufficiently to slick his hair and arrange his tie before the mirror there. When he returned, he observed calmly:—

"Well, gentlemen, there's only one mate for a woman of this kind—our friend, Kitt St. John."

Meanwhile, in a different part of the town, a scene was being enacted that was not without pathos.

"I have come to say good-bye," a man was saying to a girl who was trying hard to control her emotions.

"To say good-bye," she echoed faintly. "I don't understand . . ."

"You have heard—you have read the morning papers?"

The girl shook her head.

"Do you mean to tell me that you do not know the story that was told in court before a multitude of people?"

Again the girl shook her head and murmured:—

“No—only a very little—I have refused to see the papers, to listen to . . .”

The man seemed lost in the extremity of wonder. He started to speak, checked himself, and finally said in a low voice:—

“You see before you a man, at whom one-half the town laughs—the other half scorns. On the whole, I think I would rather be the clever scoundrel who is cutting his way through the distance, no one knows where, than to be the dupe, the fool, the stupid, blundering idiot I have been!”

“But, I don’t understand you!” She looked up at him appealingly.

He was silent a moment before he broke out again in self-upbraidings.

“I say it was dastardly in me to do this thing. But, suffering as I was, the temptation was too great . . .”

The girl’s bosom heaved, the tears rushed to her eyes.

“Oh, Kitt, how could you—why did you do it? Surely . . .”

The man held up his hand.

"Kitt!" he exclaimed at her use of that name. "How many times," he asked, "how many times do you think that Kittredge St. John has been inside this house?" Distressed as he was, he half-smiled.

The girl was puzzled.

"I don't know," she answered mechanically. "How many times has he—how many times have you been here?"

"Kittredge St. John," went on the man, "has been here only once; that once was the night he burglarised your house."

"What!" exclaimed the girl. She was dazed. "Only once, Kitt!"

"I am *not* Kittredge St. John; I am . . ." He did not give her time to interpose a word, but went on rapidly to say: "Dorothy, I have come to say good-bye. You will soon know why I would give anything almost if you had read—if you had heard my story from other people. It would save me much humiliation, spared you this explanation. You know," he continued, "that, time and time again, I have promised to explain the strange mystery that enveloped me. In fact, many times I have been on the point of telling you, but, even

when I knew the truth in all its hideousness, I still kept faith with the man whom, somehow, I had learned to look upon as a benefactor—the man who, at last, has well-nigh ruined me. But now, if you will hear me to the end, I will tell you everything.”

Dorothy's lips quivered, but she did not speak. Whereupon, without excuse of any kind, without sparing himself in any way, he told her the same story that had been told in the courtroom the day before and that was literally being heralded from the house-tops. When he had concluded, he turned to her and said somewhat sadly: “I would like to hear you say, Dorothy, that you forgive me; then I'll go.”

The girl stood motionless. She was overpowered with what she had heard—the mystery, the exposure, and, above all, the weakness of the man who faced her. After a while, she said in a low voice:—

“But where are you going—why should you go . . . ?”

“Ah, you don't understand,” he answered thoughtfully. “From the standpoint of the town, my position is not an enviable one. They know

me as a catspaw, an under-dog. And yet . . .” He shrugged his shoulders hopelessly.

Impulsively the girl crossed the room and laid her hand upon his arm.

“No,” she said, “you’re not going to leave town, you’re going to stay right here and face what there is to face—show the people that you’re not afraid to bear the brunt of their cavil and criticism.”

“Do you mean to say that you’ll forgive me—that you can forgive . . .”

“Forgive!” she exclaimed. “There is nothing for me to forgive.”

“But surely you must despise me,” he went on, his face white and set. “Fortunately, though, the town knows but little of our relations, for I took good care, while I believed in St. John, that none should know about you and myself.”

“But how can I despise you,” she murmured softly, “when I love you as I do?”

“You have said it, Dorothy; it remained for you to say it; I couldn’t even hope that you would say it.” He laughed. It was good to hear him. There were relief and joy and happiness in that

free laugh of his. But it lasted only a moment, for soon his face grew grave again.

"Why, it is not possible!" he said. "I am looked upon as an outcast, a . . ."

"Do you mean to say," she interrupted, looking him full in the face, "that there is nothing in this world worth while but public opinion? Do you mean to say that two people, who have been bound together as you and I have, can be separated by the fear of public opinion? Is your nature no deeper than that?" She paused. "I would not say this—perhaps I ought not to say this—if I did not think that you really loved me. I can't tell you how much relieved I am to have heard your story from your own lips, to know that you are really the man that I had hoped you were. For if ever a girl in this world doubted the man she loved—yes, I admit it, I have doubted you. Of course when you were with me I believed you against all reason, but when you were away I could do nothing but reason against all belief. But, if you think," she continued in a lighter vein, "that you can escape from an entangling alliance by the argument that you have advanced this morning, you are very much mistaken. For there

are two parties to every compact, and in this case I happen to be one of them."

She stopped and moved towards him. He took her in his arms, a look of rapture succeeding the look of wonder in his eyes.

Presently he put her away from him, and, squaring his shoulders, he said:—

"But let me tell you this, dear, before we go any further. I'm going to live down all the past, prove to you and everybody that I'm not what they think I am, that I'm not a catspaw, but a man; and when I've done that, and not a day before, Dorothy, will I claim you for my own."

Her face was radiant as she raised her lips to his.

"But I've claimed you, Kitt," she whispered softly to him.

To his surprise, he found himself laughing.

"But please remember that I'm not Kitt . . ."

Dorothy made a little moue and glanced archly into his eyes. She placed both hands confidently upon his straight shoulders, and, as he gathered her in his arms, she looked up into his face and whispered:—

"There's one thing, though, that you haven't told me, one thing I want very much to know."

"And what is that?" he answered, smiling down upon her.

"Your name," she told him coyly.

THE END